

AIN SLEES

MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS



Black
under

THOMAS H. HARRIS
LAWRENCE J. HARRIS

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Vol. XLVI

JANUARY, 1921

No. 5

AINSLIE'S

The Magazine That Entertains

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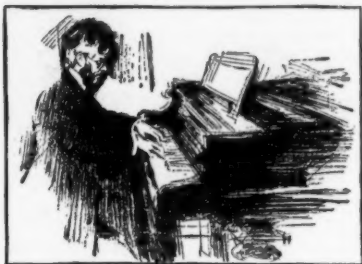
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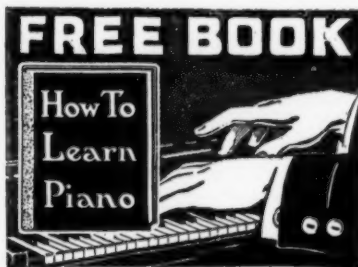


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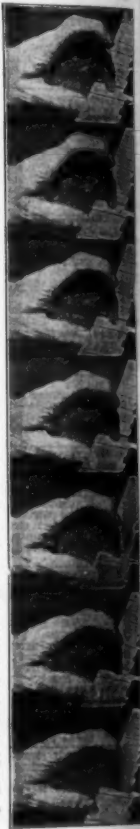
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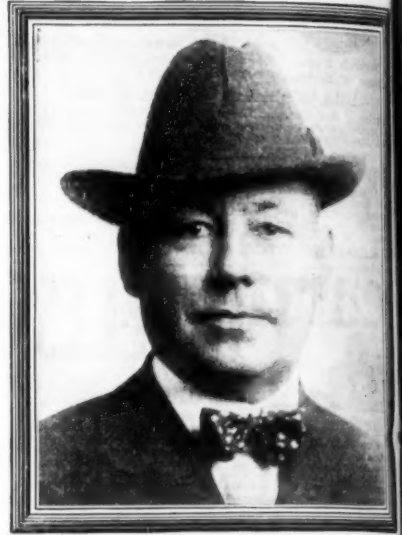
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Warren Hartle

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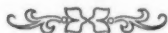
JANUARY, 1921.

No. 5.

Talked About

By Katharine Hill

Author of "The Half-Gods Go,"
"The Pearl and the Técla," etc.



CHAPTER I.

SHE was one of those women who are enormously preoccupied about men, who find their chief interest in exploring and familiarizing themselves with new types of men, and who are restless and dissatisfied in the inevitable intervals that punctuate their love affairs.

A man was a man to Beatrice, and she couldn't give an expressman directions about a trunk without some implied flattery of his strength, sending him away with a delightful, stimulated consciousness of belonging to the conquering sex, and a warm memory of her smile. A visiting prince or a cub reporter; a millionaire or—as in that one of her episodic romances with which her story opens—a demagogue, were alike fish to her net, and she was rich, beautiful, and young enough to choose her antagonist in her favorite game without reference to conventional considerations.

On the afternoon when she first saw Joe Manice, he was addressing a crowd of prospective voters in a square occasionally used for such gatherings, and



Beatrice, returning early from a happily timed round of calls when almost everybody had been out, found her car for a few moments blocked by the overflow of his hearers into the street.

"What is it?" she asked of her chauffeur.

"I dunno, Miss Beatrice," was William's intelligent answer.

The girl was as curious as a cat. An occurrence without an explanation was a torment to her, and since the explanation of this crowd lay doubtless in the words of the speaker, who would be audible were she a few yards nearer him, she was naturally not satisfied to acquiesce in William's contented ignorance.

"Well, wait here!" she said, and, springing from the car, began to push her way through the crowd with that energy of purpose and indifference to the comfort of others which had made her father rich, and which she had inherited from him.

The man on whose words all these people hung was, she saw when she had penetrated well to the front of his hearers, a striking-enough figure. His easy

bearing and sureness of gesture reminded her of an actor's; he seemed to have established at once a friendly rapport with his audience, and he betrayed no strain, no effort in speaking to them. He was, she guessed, about thirty-five years old, and even the badly made suit he was wearing did not seriously prejudice his fine build and proportioning. His face, when during a momentary impressive pause he composed it from the grimaces and contortions that accompanied his speech, she saw to be well-modeled and lit by a pair of clear, authoritative eyes. The dominant impression she received was one of strength, and strength never failed to attract Beatrice.

What he said, of course, meant nothing to her, though she noticed that it brought swift applause from the other listeners. She marvelled that any one so forceful and interesting should waste his time talking of matters so essentially stupid as these of appropriations and city offices and the juggling of franchises. She was amused to note that the sinner most bitterly denounced, the archenemy of the people, the Warwick of the dominant political party, was the harmless and delightful father of her best friend. Against him the most amazing epithets were hurled, the worst charges made, and the speaker urged every one present to come to a monster meeting to be held the night before the election, when the charges he was now merely hinting at should be amplified and proved—proved, he shouted with unction, "up to the hilt!"

"Who is that man?" Beatrice asked of a woman standing by her.

"The one that's speaking, you mean?" The woman tried tactfully to hide the surprise that widened her eyes at the question. "Why, that's Manice—Joe Manice, you know!"

After a few minutes' longer consideration of Manice, Beatrice, with the technical dexterity won by fifty past

performances of the same feat, fell in love with him. Behind her stretched a blank period of nearly five weeks in which her horizon had held no masculine figure of interest, distinction, or that supreme quality of imperfect acquaintance. If she had, that afternoon, encountered a personable pianist or a sympathetic college professor, probably with equal hospitality, she would have received him into her heart, for that virgin altar had been fireless now for many days, and the first attractive man she met with was destined to be enshrined there. At the psychological moment she became aware of Joe Manice. He was good looking, very much alive, very virile, very strong. Better than all, he was something entirely new in Beatrice's experience, since, until now, her romantic excursions had never led her outside her own class. Determining that she would see a great deal of him, in some way not at present wholly clear, Beatrice stood till the end of his speech, applauded him thoughtfully with a pair of white-gloved hands, drawn from the perfumed recesses of her mole-skin muff—hands that showed oddly among the bare or shabbily gloved ones that beat themselves about her—and made her way back to the waiting car.

CHAPTER II.

It was on Thursday Miss Cowdrey heard Manice speak, and on Saturday she was to go to a house party, to be prolonged over the election, at the home of Lucia Powell, whose father's exposure Manice had threatened to complete at his political meeting on Monday night. The guests were, as always when Lucia entertained, the most influential and the smartest people in town. There were, to be sure, certain fastidious quarters to which neither girl had ever succeeded in winning full entrance, but the city was ruled by an oligarchy of powerful business men, and Amos Cow-

drey's position in the inmost circle, as well as his daughter's beauty and confident self-assertion, had made her one of the foremost figures in that section of society whose doings are the most advertised, and indispensable at such a gathering. The men invited were mostly young, aggressive, and very simple in their psychology; the women, Beatrice and Lucia excepted, were, or had recently been, their wives. Socially speaking, the occasion was a brilliant one, and Beatrice had not felt justified in shirking it even to go to hear Manice again, but, preoccupied as she was with thoughts of him, it looked to her in prospect mortally dull.

She was duly bored on the Saturday and the Sunday, and went in to dinner Monday night with Clarence Winslow—an ingenuous young man who had taken the game for earnest when she had played it with him a year before—expecting nothing but boredom still.

At the far end of the table there was a new man to-night, somebody cut off by flowers from her view, whose face, in the odd section she was able to see of it, looked morbid, dark, and interesting. Beatrice was twisting her neck about in the endeavor to get a good look at this man, and mentally framing reproaches to Lucia for having said nothing to her about him, when her attention was diverted by an unexpected turn in the conversation about her.

Some one asked a question of Mr. Powell about the election, and the interest in the subject was so great among the men that for a while the talk became general. Manice's name was in the air, tossed from mouth to mouth, and with execration. Beatrice was delighted to hear him talked of, however unfavorably, and while pretending not to listen, she hung on all that was said, so that Winslow had difficulty in gaining her attention. It was a night of surprises, and he, too, interested her from the moment he opened his mouth.

"Say, Beatrice, can you beat this?" he began—he had conquered the privilege of her first name in the course of the episode referred to. "This fellow Manice, that they're all talking about—Joe Manice——"

She hadn't been so gracious to him since last year. She smiled dazzlingly and, putting her right elbow on the table, shut out the aspirant for her attention on that side effectually and gave herself wholly to Winslow.

"Why, we've got him locked up in Powell's study!" he confided, delighted with the interest he was creating. "You know who he is? He used to work for Powell once, and I guess he stole some papers or something; anyhow, he seems to have the goods on the old man about one or two little deals. Now, Beatrice, *you* know and I know that you can't expect a big man like Powell to pay attention to what the law says about every little thing—and at that, I guess your father was in on these deals, or most of them. Well, naturally, the men that own a town like this expect to run it. But you get a fellow like this Manice agitating and speaking around like he's been doing, and once in a while the beans get spilled at elections, and that costs money. Well, the big meeting was rounded up for to-night in Auerbach's Hall, and they'll have to stamp their feet some time before their precious Manice shows up to blow to them any more!"

"But what—how——"

"Old man's idea. He's had two, three men scouting around in closed cars the last week, looking for a chance. To-day they caught up with him in an empty street, hoisted him into the car, gagged him, and brought him along. Simple, isn't it? And there he is, right under this roof now!"

"But what on earth are you going to do with him?" inquired Beatrice, hiding her excitement under a mask of

light curiosity. "You can't keep him locked up here for the rest of his life!"

"Sure we can, if we want to. Keep him there till election's over, anyway. Then he can talk his mouth off, if he can get anybody to listen."

"Couldn't he sue you or something?"

"Sue nothing! If the election goes right, our side will own the courts, won't we? But I don't know what we'll decide to do with him. When you women are out of the way, we'll maybe go in and have some fun with him."

"Fun with him?"

"Oh, rough-house him a bit—I don't know exactly what. But it's naturally riling to have a bird like that saying the sort of things about you that he's been saying. I'd interview him with a club if I was old man Powell!"

Beatrice turned admiring eyes on him and spoke guilefully.

"I think it's perfectly splendid, when people like that act that way, for men like you and Mr. Powell to just high-handedly put them out of the way! It's sort of medieval, isn't it—kidnaping and imprisoning your enemies on your own premises, without bothering about the law? I suppose Mr. Powell has the key of the study in his breast pocket——"

"Why, I've got it myself! I was the only one dressed, when they brought this bird in, so he gave it to me till after dinner—afraid he'd forget it and his man wouldn't change the keys in his clothes, I guess."

Winslow proudly displayed, beneath the table level, an ordinary-enough-looking Yale key.

Beatrice noted the pocket to which he returned it, and later she renewed last year's flirtation to such purpose that, as she suffered with some distaste his hot kisses on her neck, her hand, dropping down from his shoulder, cleverly dipped into a certain pocket and bore off something small and heavy. Winslow was too intoxicated with cham-

pagne as well as love-making to notice the loss, and the next moment, without him in the least understanding how he had offended her, Beatrice was quarrelling with him violently, stabbing him with cruel epithets, and leaving him.

She went, of course, directly to the study of her host. It had been chosen for its remoteness by Mr. Powell in the first instance for his own retirement, and now by the men in conference for a temporary prison. As Lucia's dearest friend, Beatrice was, of course, familiar with every corner of the house, and knew how, entering through a little-used upstairs sitting room at the end of a corridor, the study was best reached. If she saw any one she would say that she had felt faint and wanted to rest a little before beginning to dance.

To-night the sitting room was dark, and as she entered it the lines of light around the study door winked out as well. Her heart thumping with excitement, she inserted the key in the Yale lock and turned it softly, making as little noise as possible, and at once, before she had well stepped over the threshold, encountered the most shocking of surprises.

Abruptly, and for the first time in her life, she became the victim of violence. Big fingers clutched her throat, savagely choking down the cry that rose there. Almost at the same moment her head was jerked backward and iron knuckles weakly brushed the side of her chin.

"By gosh, it's a woman!" came a hoarse whisper close to her ear, and the horrible pressure on her throat relaxed.

The sudden attack had overbalanced her, and Manice was supporting her as he went on earnestly:

"Are you hurt? I couldn't stop that blow—I could only pull you away from it. It was started before I felt—how smooth and bare your neck was. Gee, if it had landed right you'd have been

a dead one! Are you all right now? You won't scream, will you? Can you stand alone?"

Shaken and bruised, she was utterly unfit, but she made some sound which he must have taken for assent, for he released her at once and she staggered backward, to fall heavily against the half-closed door behind her. It slammed shut and the spring lock clicked smartly as it caught, imprisoning them together.

"Now you've done it!" Beatrice gasped.

He had moved away, and the next moment the electric light blazed overhead, showing them to each other.

She saw the man she had seen on Thursday and whose image had been with her ever since. He saw a girl whose dark hair, wrenched and disordered by his sacrilegious hand, hung low, but thanks to some grace of growth and training, becomingly enough, about brows and neck; whose cheeks were red with excitement—he took it for the deserved anger—and whose magnificent eyes blazed passionately at him. Her prettiness and spirit would have made an irresistible appeal to all that was best in the man, but his gaze swept down her figure, lingering by the way on the pearls at her neck. Her gown, shading from palest yellow to warm apricot, clipped her exquisite shapeliness with a beauty and sureness of line that said "Poirot" to the initiate; its mystery of overlapping velvet, satin, georgette, and lace, even to his dense ignorance, spoke of money which he branded as ill-gained.

He had been brought here and thrust into durance by the men who presumably enjoyed her smiles, and he had every reason to fear actual mishandling from them, carried to lengths that might be unpleasant enough. At best, his plans were seriously disarranged by his detention. He felt anything but cordial toward the intruder, and he scowled at her in sullen silence.

She had dropped into a chair and was stroking her throat, where, indeed, the marks of Manice's fingers were plainly visible. Her chin, too, showed on its delicate surface some abrasion and reddening where he had struck her.

"You hurt me *frightfully*," she said plaintively.

"Well, what do you expect," he asked with a brutality that may have been assumed to hide some inward discomfort, "from a man that's fighting your father, and has been done a trick like I have? I've got to hand it to you, young lady, you have some nerve! Your gentlemen friends have kidnaped me by force and locked me up in here, and I reckon you're the daughter of Powell himself. Yet you expect me to treat you with courtesy and distinction!"

"I'm not Mr. Powell's daughter," she began. "I came here——"

"To crow over me, now I'm down," he interrupted disagreeably, "or to see what a man looks like that's got spirit enough to fight for clean politics in this community! I don't know that I'm so dog-goned sorry you got a jolt!"

He sat on the edge of Mr. Powell's desk, truculent, hostile. Beatrice found him adorable. His physical coercion of her, the helpless feeling it had given her, as of a straw in a tempest, had quickened her interest in him greatly. His attitude fascinated her by its novelty as well and, being human, she no sooner awoke to the fact that she found a charm in his hostility, than she took steps to shatter it.

"I came," she finished her interrupted sentence meekly, "to let you out!"

"What? No! Really?" His manner underwent the completest change.

"Yes. And you choked me and struck me and threw me against the door, and now—we're locked in together!"

"Girl, how could I guess you'd come with any such philanthropic purpose?"

When I heard the door open so softly I thought it was some gunman sent in to get me on the q. t. Naturally I jumped for him. Why did you want to let me out? Aren't you one of the millionaire bunch that owns the town? You've surely got some unearned increment on your back and round your neck, and as Powell's guest this interest in such as me is some surprise."

"Don't you want to get out?" Beatrice asked him, ignoring his volley of questions.

He stared.

"Want to get out! You may take it I do. Why, the whole campaign has been leading up to to-night's meeting! Why, to-night I was going to tell those dubs the inside history of the street-car franchise, and why Mahool got the nomination, and all about that munitions-claims scandal—with proofs! And the election is Tuesday! It wouldn't matter so much if I could have reached the press, but there's not a rag in town will print what I know about Powell, and why? Because he owns 'em all. Yes, you may take it I want to get out."

"Well, there's nothing I can do for you—now," she remarked cheerfully. "It may be hours before the men come up, you see."

"The longer the better, as far as I'm concerned," Manice said, and for a moment Beatrice fancied he was paying her a compliment, until he added: "When they do come, a pleasant time will be had by everybody but me, I shouldn't wonder. Well, it won't be the first time I've been beaten—if they do beat me up—and say, this is the first time I ever laid a hand on a woman, myself. I want you to know I feel worse about that than the party ahead."

"I don't know what party you're talking about," said Beatrice. "I'm here, am I not? Whoever comes, I will tell him or them to let you out. That's a promise. You needn't be in any anx-

iety about anybody attacking you—before me!"

"Do you mean you think those fellows will all take it from you what they've got to do?" he asked with a wry, incredulous smile. "Why, girl, they kotow to you in a drawing-room, but this—is this *business*! And a fat lot of attention they'll pay to anything you have to say about this!"

"Do you really think that the power of women operates only in drawing-rooms? What about Cleopatra keeping Antony away from the battle, and Helen of Troy, and all the women who've ruled kings and made laws? Don't you know any history? Take a good look at me! Does it seem so impossible to you that I could exert influence with a man if I wanted to?" The conversation was striking the personal note now that pleased Beatrice, who did not care to discuss franchises and nominations.

"I guess any woman can exert a lot of influence with her own man—I don't deny that. But this is a ring of maybe ten of them, and——"

"Of course, I don't mean they're all in love with me—or any of them! But they all know me, and I have influence—in ways you wouldn't understand. They don't want to offend me. And if I let them understand that this was a matter of real importance to me——"

"But it isn't—is it? You never saw me till to-night."

"You're mistaken," she said softly. "I had seen you before. And besides—what's time? I know at once whether I like a person, don't you? Some people I've just met mean more to me than other I've known all my life. That word 'affinity' has been horribly vulgarized, but it does mean something. Do you believe in love at first sight?"

He was staring at her aghast.

"Why," he stammered. "I guess there's a misunderstanding here. Love, did you say?"

"Love—I said love." She smiled her best smile—slow, subtle, ensnaring. "It's an abstract question, as old as the hills. We won't discuss it, if you'd rather not. But if I said to these men that I love you——"

Embarrassment had flooded Manice's face with red.

"I guess," he said, "I guess I owe you an apology. You mean, you believe in fair play and clean politics, and in order to get me out of this and give our side a show, you're offering to say something to the people here about us that—that couldn't possibly be true. You see, I'm still funny in my head from some knocks I got in the scrap this afternoon, and I thought—well, honestly, I'd hate to tell you what I thought you meant!"

What Beatrice might have said next she afterward shuddered to think. His confusion was appealing in the extreme, and so carried away was she by the excitement of the situation, the newness of Manice as a type, and the danger in which he had almost persuaded her that he stood, that she would almost surely have repeated in some convincing form the outrageous declaration he had just, so happily, misunderstood.

But it was precisely at this moment that a sound from the outer room caught the attention of both. A man's step approached with no attempt at caution, and mingled intriguingly enough with a little, chiming clink, for which neither of them found an explanation.

Manice motioned to her for silence and, crossing to the electric switch, stabbed out the light with a hasty finger; then, as Beatrice's ears told her, moved toward the door to lie in wait for the newcomer just as, half an hour earlier, he must have lain in wait for her. The girl's very hair roots tingled with apprehension and suspense as she waited a long thirty seconds, thankful for the shelter of Mr. Powell's big desk,

to the farther side of which she noiselessly felt her way.

The clinking sound came again, more decidedly, then stopped. The key grated, the door opened just as she had known it must, and some one stepped across the threshold. And the next instant the desperate scuffle her nerves were tense for, began in the darkened room. She heard blows, heavy breathing, profane mutterings, and the lurch of two big bodies against walls and furniture; once one of the fighters was flung against the edge of the desk and it moved on its casters some inches nearer to Beatrice.

Her position, as so close a neighbor of a struggle whose progress she could not follow, was intolerable. It was curiosity rather than any other motive, rather than any wish to help Manice or even to escape from the room herself, that made her presently act, and when the battle had rolled to another quarter, spring to the buttons in the wall and flood the room with light.

She had given no assistance to Manice by her step, for almost on the instant the other man broke his grip, spring back a pace or two, and snapped out a revolver, and Manice's hands went up, to the infinite contempt and disappointment of the girl. Already his conventional apology for his violence to her had done him some disservice with her, and now, even before she had turned her eyes on the conqueror, she forswore the sorry hero. It was characteristic of her that she did not even stop to consider how different the situation might have been had it been Manice, and not the other, who was armed.

He was the man she hadn't been able to see at dinner, the man Lucia—how like Lucia—had presented to herself, a completely new man, and attractive—Beatrice decided exultantly—simply was not the word for him. His galvantry carried head had the perfection

of an old coin; his was dark and disheveled; his eyes hawklike on his captive; his whole bearing instinct with that healthy anger which makes a man, if personable at all, irresistible to a woman of Beatrice's type.

She uttered a little cry and for a second his gaze slewed around to her, jerking back to Manice, however, before his revolver barrel had wavered an inch from its proper direction.

"Well, what the—— Well, who on earth are you, and how did you get here?" he exploded. "Were you at dinner?"

"I put on the light," said Beatrice in self-satisfied tones; certainly she was glad now that she had had that inspiration.

"Then thanks. Some one must have, of course—I wonder I didn't think of that. But—I don't understand. What are you doing here, of all places?"

"I was at dinner. I've known the Powells all my life—Lucia's my dearest friend. I came here," she invented hastily, "for a book Mr. Powell had spoken to me about, and—the key was in the door."

Ordinarily Beatrice was a liar of respectable technique, but to-night she was so shaken by the rush of events that a child would not have believed her. Dion Mallory, sparing her another swift glance that noted her tumbling hair, flushed face, and torn dress, jumped with disgust to a conclusion that was only a wrong one because of the painfully conventional standards which Manice shared with the bulk of his class. The fellow was magnetic and quite strikingly good looking, and she had uttered no complaint of him, as must have been her first impulse if her story had been true, and he had failed in respectfulness.

"I am Beatrice Cowdrey, and I am here, of course, for the house party," the girl continued complacently; she was far from guessing the opinion Mal-

lory was forming of her. "That explains me, I believe—now what did you come for, please?"

"I! I was bringing the fellow something to eat. It just occurred to me that nobody might think of it, and Mr. Powell preferred not to send in a man, when I suggested it. He can go hungry now, for me!"

"Oh, for the love of Mike, trot it along!" begged Manice suddenly. "I haven't eaten since eight this morning. Be a regular guy! Go right on having a heart!"

"Would you mind getting it, then, Miss Cowdrey? On the table right there by the door. I have to keep our friend covered."

Beatrice set down the tray before the man who had temporarily interested her, and his table manners completed the alienation of her affections. She no longer cared in the least what happened to him, and nothing could be easier now than to slip away through the open door. But she had given him a promise, and there was a fundamental sportsmanship in the girl.

She drew near to Mallory and asked in an undertone:

"What's the next thing? Is he in danger—bodily danger?"

"Danger? Here?" He stared.

"He seems to think he is. And Clarence Winslow said you meant to 'rough-house' him."

"Winslow!" Mallory's utterance of the name routed at once the wild notions she had given ear to, showed her—what, indeed, she had known before—the opinion that men had of Clarence and his ideas, and convicted her of fatuous folly in believing him. Manice was excusable enough for his own apprehensions; he did not know the man he had to deal with in Gilbert Powell. But she, Beatrice, knew him, and she saw now that she had simply been making a fool of herself. Mr. Powell, for his own reasons, might take high-handed

methods when important issues were at stake, but his despotism was on the whole benevolent, and his sincerity in believing it so at least unquestionable. That he could countenance brutality to his temporary prisoner was unthinkable. She had a moment of real salutary shame for having almost thought it.

Still, she had given a promise to Manice; she had engaged herself definitely to see that he was released. And she said to Dion Mallory, now urgently:

"You must let him out of here. Please! At once!"

"Let him out! But he was shut in here for an excellent reason by our host himself. Really, I think you must not ask me to interfere with Mr. Powell's plans!"

"I'll answer to Mr. Powell! But he *must* be let out. I have my reasons! If you won't do it, I will. I suppose you'll hardly interfere to prevent me."

He mused, his eyes on her under twisted brows. She "had her reasons," had she? Why, it was a sheer confession that there was something between her and this political adventurer. Disgraceful and disgusting! The more so, somehow, because of her beauty. What were girls coming to nowadays?

But since she chose to take that tone about it, she left him nothing to do but to obey her. After all, the main end of Manice's detention had been accomplished. The meeting at which he had meant to speak would be over before he could possibly get back to town.

"I'll answer for my own actions, thank you," he told her curtly, and to Manice he said, "Come along, man! I'm going to turn you loose. Don't make more noise than you can help."

Manice took a half-eaten turkey drumstick with him and marched quickly out, after a word of acknowledgment and an offered handshake for Beatrice in passing, which she haughtily disregarded. To Mallory, however, she made some suggestions about

a servant's stairway and a back entrance, since he did not know the house; watched the men to the end of the corridor, and then hurried to her own room.

One glance in the mirror showed her that there would be no dancing for her that night, nor the next. She rang for her maid and sent word to Lucia that she had gone to bed with a terrible headache.

CHAPTER III.

At ten o'clock the next morning Miss Cowdrey sat up in bed and again, by the light of that early hour, examined her full white throat and the rounded side of her chin. The discolored neck didn't matter; one could always wear something high in the daytime and a dog collar at night. But it is not easy to cover up the chin in a country where veils are worn only in the street, and when Lucia presently knocked and came in, Beatrice exhibited hers ruefully.

"Beatrice! You poor thing! What on earth——"

"Just clumsiness. I ran into the edge of a door in the dark."

"Then that was the headache last night? What fierce luck! It looks awful."

"Isn't it the absolute limit? I might as well be in prison, as far as seeing people goes. Can you send me up something palpitating to read? And some candy. I have cigarettes enough here to go with. Or, Lucia, suppose I go home? I have a veil with a ducky little spray that comes just there."

"What's the point of going? You'd have to shut yourself up just the same, and nobody but your kid sisters to talk to. Here you have me, at least. Besides, this is election day, you know—horribly noisy in town. The children have those horns and things. Much better stay!"

"Well, it *would* be a bore getting

up and going. Oh! Lucia. Tell me about the new man. I notice you put me as far away from him as I could get and still be at the same table, so he must be as interesting as he looks."

"Isn't he a winner? I'm very glad you're laid up while he's here. I hadn't met him myself before father brought him home—or I wouldn't even have asked you together."

"One's bound to meet a man like that sooner or later."

"Well, I shall have made a little running first. His name's Dion Mallory."

"Is he one of the Mallorys? I thought they were all dead, or something."

"I believe he's the last one, and so all the money comes to him. This is old Mrs. Mallory's son, and he owns that gorgeous house where she used to entertain so much when you and I were babies, and the place just beyond the country club, too. He used to be in New York or abroad most of the time, writing or something, and he was an aviator in the war, and all kinds of an ace. His poems are simply wonderful, Beatrice—either too passionate for words or else you can't imagine what they're about. I'll send them up to you, shall I?"

"Please! Do they rhyme?"

"Gracious, no! He's a *modern*. He does one-act plays, too—I want him to do us one for the dramatic club."

"He seems a good deal of an acquisition," said Beatrice, twisting a black curl pensively. "But for goodness sake, don't make him think we never had an interesting man here before! What are you going to do to-day, by the way?"

"Nothing much this morning. Nearly everybody seems to be still in bed. After lunch we're all going to motor in to vote. The house will be practically deserted all afternoon, so you can get up and prowl around safely, if you feel inclined."

"I suppose I *could* go in and vote, too, with that veil on," Beatrice said thoughtfully.

"Well, we're not *only* going to vote, of course. We shall go somewhere and get tea, and dance."

"All right, if you don't want me! Rustle me those poems then, will you, dear—and some magazines and novels—and have you any marrons glacés in the house? Well, some of the pistachio chocolates, then. And pitch me my cigarette case, will you? Thanks; you're an angel!"

Lucia departed and Beatrice, pensively puffing smoke rings toward the black ceiling, lay pondering until a maid knocked and bore in the consolations she had ordered.

She opened Mallory's poems before taking a bonbon, an indication of strong interest, indeed. Even the title page, with its strong, black lettering of the book's name: "The Sea of Shadows," and Mallory's own name, and the imprint of a most creditable publisher, held her attention for some moments.

The poems themselves were, as Lucia had said, beautifully obscure when they were not rather startlingly explicit. But Lucia had clearly not read very far, for about halfway through the wide-margined little book there began to be sprinkled lyrics in the old tradition, verses with rhyme and meter, even occasional poems cast in the strict mold of the sonnet. Beatrice, like many of us, had a sneaking preference for this sort of thing, though aware that it is more knowing to speak scornfully of it.

I love you for the candor of your eyes,
Your lips that cannot speak the thing untrue,
The unimagined innocence of you
That greets me hourly as a dear surprise—

She read this through twice, reread it, and reached for a chocolate. That, of course, was merely the expression of a mood. He had other moods, as

there were other poems to show. With greater satisfaction she read:

You have loved other men before you knew
me, I'm well aware,
Soft lips, deep eyes—you will be faithless to
me, but you are fair!

You are too fair for any man's condemning,
mine last of all,

Your face, Gisèle, absolves you from your
sinning, before you fall!

After luncheon she lay on in bed until she heard the sounds of departing motor cars, and a stillness descended on the big house, for even the servants, with the exception of the English butler and the Frenchwomen who were the maids of the women in the house, had gone to record their political convictions at the polls. Beatrice watched the last car out of sight from her window, and then, pursuant to Lucia's suggestion, she got up, bathed, slipped into a not-too-informal negligee of mauve satin, and wandered downstairs.

Meeting nobody, she turned into the music room and began to play a fragment of Debussy very badly on Lucia's grand piano. Her strong white fingers had no technique at all, but she was unmusical enough to like the sound of her own playing, and she strayed from one thing into another until she heard the door open behind her and turned her head to see, to her real surprise, Dion Mallory, standing in the doorway.

Well, anyhow, she looked nice at the piano, and perhaps he wasn't musical, either.

But people who write poetry commonly are, and Mallory had come in, as a matter of fact, to ask whichever servant was making the noise that disturbed him, kindly to desist. Naturally, he did not make that request of Miss Cowdrey, a reference to whose sufferings upstairs he had planned by way of softening his criticism.

"Delighted to see you up, Miss Cowdrey. Won't you go on playing?"

"No, I won't," she said promptly.

"Don't bother to be polite—I know I play abominably. That's why I only do it when there's no one about. Why aren't you in town voting with the rest?"

"I'm a poor, disfranchised alien—been away too long. Next year I shall have the privilege of voting the ticket which, I understand, is indorsed and practically made up by our host."

"You mean to stay then, now?"

"Yes, I expect to live here. There seems to be a lot of business interests to attend to. I can get back to town every once in a while. But this really is my home, although I've been away a lot. Oh, I shall stay—*now!*"

He was economical of materials, making the quietly uttered "*now*" say all that another man might have conveyed in an involved form of words, but not all men are aided in their effects by the sort of long-lashed, soot-edged, expressive eyes whose liquid blue surprised one in Mallory's dark face. They were oddly shaped eyes, Beatrice noticed, so widely open at the corners, the lids so straight across the irides, that they were oblongs rather than the more usual, pointed ovals.

With a swing of her supple body that she rightly felt must be charming to the observer, she turned away from the piano, rested her hand on the outer edge of the bench, and gave him the side of her face that was not disfigured.

"It's rather lucky for both of us, isn't it, that we both stayed home? I was bored. I've been reading your poems this morning."

"What did you expect," he asked with a funny look of vexation, just visible before he suppressed the expression of his feeling.

"I wasn't bored *then!* That was hours ago. Lucia brought them up."

"It was too kind of her—and of you."

"Oh, I *loved* them! I think they

are wonderful. It must be wonderful to write poetry. I wish I could."

"It's quite easy. Why don't you?"

"Oh, I can't. I can't write anything. So many of yours seem to have been inspired by women. It must be wonderful to inspire a poem. I never even did *that*—not one that was any good. I liked your 'Gisèle' group the best. Now *don't* tell me she isn't a real person!"

"She's real enough," he said briefly.

"She must be fascinating. French women *are* so fascinating! I suppose she is somebody you knew abroad. Don't you think French women are more—alluring—than we are?"

She looked as alluring as she knew how, to ask the question. Her head was tilted at its happiest angle and she had forgotten the little red-and-purple patch on the side of her chin, but fortunately the small disfigurement was lost in the soft shadow that fell across that half of her face.

"Well, they give more time to it. They are"—he used a cruel word—"more subtle than Americans. But they haven't nearly so much beauty to begin with, in most cases; or it's a different kind."

"Perhaps it's more subtle, too," said Beatrice with covert fury. "That's my idea of an insult!" she was saying to herself. "To imply that one isn't subtle! I'll get back at him for that!"

"It is, of course. Their faces are so tremendously sensitive, aren't they? Plaintive, expressive. As Rolland, I believe, puts it, they make other people's faces look like continuations of their necks. Have you any French blood, Miss Cowdrey?"

With half a dozen words he had swept his insults together, metamorphosed them into a bouquet, and handed them to her.

"Yes, just a little!" Beatrice admitted—she had none, to her knowledge, but

then she did not know, either, that she had not.

"I was sure of it." He lay back for a while in the low chair he had chosen and eyed her contemplatively. She was, he decided, a rarely beautiful person, and if her methods were a trifle obvious, he nevertheless was ready to concede a real subtlety in her loveliness. Like many beautiful women, she presented a series of pictures which she was herself hardly competent to appreciate; was able to suggest things not in her own intellectual content. The loves of her ancestresses—French or otherwise—had bestowed on her a face exquisite in feature and coloring, and ravishing in the harmony of its detail. If she continued to live on in the crude selfishness and self-indulgence of her present life, it was conceivable that, at sixty, her appearance would be repellent, but as yet her own personality had scarcely begun to shape her lineaments.

Mallory might have thought her an angel if it had not been for last night, and for the remarks he had heard about her that morning, in response to his twisting of half a dozen conversations to the subject of Miss Cowdrey.

"Who is this Miss Cowdrey that disappeared after dinner last night? She's a great friend of Miss Powell's, is she?"

"She's the best fun in town. Some queen, to look at, isn't she? A good sport. You can't shock her. Well, you can't shock any of the girls nowadays, can you?"

Or again: "You *have* been away. I should say she's about the most prominent girl in the smart set. Of course, there are people who don't approve of her. Your mother, more likely than not, wouldn't have had her on her visiting list. She is a good deal talked about, of course. I don't believe she is in with the really best people—or the fair Lucia either, for that matter. But they should worry! They're out for a

good time and, after all, it's the smart set that has the fun."

All this was confirmatory of last night's impressions. Dion Mallory, as a poet, approved vastly the theory of revolutions, and had the highest opinion of the People, whom he invariably capitalized in writing of them. Running counter to this acquired habit of mind, however, was a strong, instinctive fastidiousness, where the individual was concerned; a class feeling rather absurdly marked in an American of the present day; the sort of feeling that would have been wholly natural in a gentleman of the ancient régime.

Another survival, equally out of date and equally at loggerheads with Dion's intellectual attitude, was a Victorian predilection for the maidenly; actually, he doted on the ridiculous word and all it stood for. Beatrice Cowdrey, already talked about, had to his personal knowledge compromised herself, to some degree at least, with a man of the lower classes. And he hadn't stopped thinking about the girl since they had separated last night!

Mallory was a man and, in spite of his standards, he found something pleasurable in the freedom with which he felt that her behavior justified him in thinking of her. His natural powers of fascination were indeed too often hampered by his excellent bringing up, and if Beatrice had met him under more conventional auspices, it is certain that she would not have liked him half so much. It was less a matter of what he said than of the way he looked at her, of a certain infusion into the atmosphere surrounding them of an admiration not too respectful.

"I knew you had French blood," he repeated musingly.

Beatrice knew the maiden names of her grandmothers, English and Irish, and beyond that, nothing. If French blood was so desirable—and Mallory had made her feel that it was—it was

pleasant to be assured by one who apparently had inside sources of information that she possessed it. She now invented a guillotined ancestress of the highest nobility and named her Marie Thérèse de Villefranche. It was sheer luck that she did not name her De Lamballe or even De Bourbon, being somewhat hazy in what these names might connote. Her latest French novel chanced to deal with a De Villefranche, and this name accordingly popped out on top, plausibly enough. Mallory accepted it, at all events, and for a moment fell into a dream about the great ladies of France, of former centuries, who weren't offended by the advances of their inferiors, because the gulf between appeared to them so utterly impassable. He remembered the one who had exclaimed in astonishment: "Do you call that a man?" of the servant whose presence at her toilet had been criticized. Perhaps in some such way this girl— He broke from his abstraction to cry:

"What miraculous luck to have every one else off the premises! They won't be back till it's time to dress for dinner. You haven't really a headache, have you? Or it's well now?"

"Not quite well," she said plaintively; she had been looking as plaintive and sensitive as possible since he had praised those qualities, and the expression crept insensibly into her voice. "Can you cure headaches by stroking people's foreheads?"

"As the fellow said, when they asked if he could take the first violin's part, 'I don't know, but I'll try'—I'm more than ready to try. Don't sit on that hard bench, Miss Cowdrey, with nothing to lean against. Make yourself comfortable on the davenport. Another cushion? Now! You'll have to raise your hair a bit, I'm afraid, unless it's your eyebrows I'm to operate on!"

He proceeded to brush her forehead lightly, with fingers that he was proud

to find so steady. Beatrice closed her eyes, thrilling to the gentle contact, with its mingling of danger and propriety. She must look very nice, she thought, with her long lashes resting on her cheeks, and her own fingers curling up carefully over the bruise on her chin. She had noticed that nearly all faces gain in attractiveness by being seen from above, and she was content to feel his eyes upon her, to lie as if mesmerized until she heard his breathing begin to come less evenly, and his finger tips grew hot on her temples.

"How beautifully you do it!" she said drowsily.

Warned by some subconscious instinct, her eyes flew open in time to read in the face above her an imminent kiss. For a moment she balanced. No, it was too soon.

"It's *quite* gone!" she cried brightly, and sat up with a quick, lithe movement.

"Are you sure?" he asked solicitously. "Hadh'n't we better go on a little longer—just to be on the safe side?"

The safe side!

"No—*honestly*"—and it was quite true—"my head doesn't ache the least bit in the world now. Thanks so much! I think we might have some tea now, don't you? Will you ring and tell them to bring it in here?"

Mallory, too, after the disconcertment of the first moment, was ready to agree with Beatrice that it was best not to go too fast. Remembering who, as he supposed, had kissed her last, he was not sure, when he stopped to consider the matter in blood at least approximately cool, whether he wanted to kiss her at all. And yet, how enthralling her perfect face had been, delivering itself with trustful, shut lids to his devouring gaze. One lost oneself in the contemplation of beauty like that; it was like letting oneself go to some lethal drug. A girl who looked as Beatrice Cowdrey looked ought to have a soul that one could worship as sincerely as one wor-

shipped her face and form. Why couldn't Beatrice have had a soul to match her exterior? If only he hadn't known so indisputably that she had not, he would have been ready to proclaim his sentimental researches ended; to decide, with a determination which any possible opposition from her must only strengthen on making her his wife.

As it was—

He crossed the room obediently and rang for tea.

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Powell's party triumphed at the polls.

The news was brought in at the dance with which Lucia's guests, Beatrice excepted, wound up a day of activity and excitement, and from her bedroom Miss Cowdrey heard the outcry of satisfaction which the news evoked.

She was very far from caring, one way or the other, what the issue might be. Her own connection with the affair, her release of Joe Manice to put up an eleventh-hour fight which had proved too late to be effective, she had almost forgotten, and though the mob spirit would doubtless have seized her had she been downstairs, and she would have cheered loudest of any of the girls, the knowledge that her father's business interests would benefit by the result did not really stir her. Like every one else in the world, save a negligible number of favorites of fortune, she had never had as much money as she wanted, but this she ascribed not to her father's poverty but to his stinginess.

He gave her five thousand a year to dress on, and that sum seems fairly adequate until you begin to consider that a really good fur coat costs at least half that, and if the purchase of jewels is in question, the whole amount looks like chicken feed. Lucia, as an only child, had no allowance, but she spent twice as much on her clothes as Beatrice did.

In the Cowdrey household, unfortunately for Beatrice, were three other beautiful daughters with claims which they were not backward in voicing. Gladys and Guendolen were thirteen and fifteen, and them Beatrice could rule easily; she could persuade her father, too, that little girls should wear Peter Thompson suits and have a strict governorship and very little pocket money, since if they had more they would only spend it on candy, to the prejudice of their complexions and future social success. She was quite solicitous about the social success of these two young sisters, the elder of whom couldn't be brought out for three or four years yet. But the more immediate question of Irene's debut left her cold.

Irene had been eighteen in October and was clearly entitled to a coming-out party in the following month. Beatrice had had to exert all her powers of a domestic tyrant to prevent her sister's emergence, and the thing simply could not be done another year. It wouldn't have mattered if Irene had been plain, or even moderately pretty. But the little wretch was so bewitching that even the beautiful and "prominent" Miss Cowdrey must suffer something in her proximity. People made such a ridiculous fuss about debutantes, too.

Going back to town the day after election, and forced by a chin that, from having been violet must be green and then yellow before it would again consent to be white, into a distasteful retirement, Beatrice was thrown into the society of her sisters to an extent that had not prevailed for months.

Irene had crinkly, golden-brown hair, which she was putting up these days with amazing cleverness; she had wild-rose coloring and features as good as Beatrice's own, and an adorable, young, rounded slimness. She had finished with lessons, and she lounged about the house in frocks too good for a sub-deb, nursing her grievance and having,

nevertheless, a number of boy callers and afternoon engagements. Beatrice had leisure to notice and to frown on these, in the week's retirement imposed on her by her chin.

"What's Clarence Winslow coming to see *you* for?" she demanded disagreeably of Irene, as the girl trailed back into the upstairs sitting room, a sanctuary from visitors, to which Beatrice was restricted for the time.

"Why shouldn't he, if he feels like it?"

"I didn't know you even knew him!"

"I used to go in and entertain him sometimes, out of common politeness, when he was coming to see you so much last year, and half the time you'd tell him he could come and then not be there yourself. I like him. I think he's *heaps* of fun!"

"He's an utter ass!" said Beatrice contemptuously. "I wish you could hear the way men—real men—speak of him! Then, perhaps, you wouldn't be so conceited about your conquest—if it is a conquest!"

She was confident that she had only to give Winslow a side glance to recall him. She did not want him, but to punish Irene's presumption she had half thoughts of making the exertion, and might have done so if she had been less preoccupied with thoughts of Dion Mallory.

For Beatrice was by now headlong in love with Dion and had decided, furthermore, that in him she had found the husband she had been waiting for. She had always meant, of course, to marry and to marry brilliantly, and Dion Mallory was the son of the woman who had ruled her city's society so autocratically that on her death there was no one fitted to succeed her, no one, even today, whose name carried half the prestige of hers. To become Mrs. Dion Mallory would be in some sort to inherit her position, and this, to a girl who had encountered some social snubs, the

bitterer for her pretensions and her usual immunity, was a possibility more tempting than the greatest dignities elsewhere.

The beautiful house, closed so long, was open again now, but without a hostess, and Dion's own achievements, both in arms and in song, coupled with his great personal attractiveness, made him the "catch" par excellence, not of one season only but of all the seasons Beatrice could remember. She resolved to marry him with the same crude positiveness that she brought to all her determinations.

But side by side with this was a flickering uncertainty new to her, born of love. He had captured her romantic fancy, stirred the passion that slept in her. She was Beatrice Cowdrey, complacently sure of her own beauty, accustomed to conquest, but was it possible that he had never met any one more attractive? Was it not horribly probable that the Gisèle of the poems had his heart; and, if so, was it in reason to doubt that he had hers?

Beatrice refined on her usual methods, exceeded her allowance to please him, to an extent that called forth one of Amos Cowdrey's rare remonstrances. She and Mallory met constantly that winter, of course. But to her amazement and chagrin, he did not pay her the attentions she confidently awaited.

He was, perhaps, afraid to trust himself alone with the beautiful and darling girl. He called, when it was obligatory that he should call, on her day at home, asked her to dance very seldom, and maneuvered himself out of a tableau in which she was to appear, in the big charity entertainment, and into the picture with Lucia Powell.

Lucia went about complacently that winter; she was being "rushed" by Dion Mallory, and a coolness came up between her and her dearest friend. Beatrice might have been a little propitiated

had she known how often Lucia and Dion, through the latter's steering of the conversation, talked about her. He was familiar, before the winter was over, with the broad outlines of her past and with such of her escapades, at least, as the other girl had taken part in. He knew of their evening sallies, the summer before they came out, across the lake to the men's clubhouse; of the barefoot-dancing incident that had caused a sensation before people got hardened to barefoot dancing; of the unchaperoned motoring trip, when the great Rolls-Royce had raced all night so that the girls might see the sun rise from a certain picturesque point of vantage. Going had been delightful, Lucia had told him—a wildly gay rush under big, paling stars, a sky gradually rose-suffused, and the picnic breakfast in the level hot sunlight, with the uncannily long shadows fingering out over the valley, had been bizarre and amusing, but coming home, every one had been cross, Lucia's partner had all but gone to sleep over his steering wheel, and a devastatingly comprehensive quarrel had in the end temporarily alienated each member of the party from every other one.

Dion had heard these things, and he had seen the dozen or more photographs of Beatrice, which she had from time to time bestowed upon her friend.

He looked longest at the picture of Miss Cowdrey at seventeen.

Her figure had been very long and boyish at that age; her face devoid of the sophistication that had since touched it; her eyes avid already, however, for excitement and experiment; the mouth eager but tremulous. It was the face of a believer in life, whom the tragedy of things would never overwhelm as long as it left her immune; who was strong enough and dowered enough to be serenely conscious that tragedy was unlikely to touch her, and of resilient fiber hard to crush, had fate turned to the task.

But if one might have met her then, have led that exploring instinct into safe channels of artistic, literary, or humanitarian research, have educated, loved, and softened her! For "that Cowdrey girl" was rare material at seventeen, and Dion suspected that even now, nine years later, there was still in her an unquenchable spark under the drift of material immediacies. For himself he abjured the hunting for it, that winter, and went instead from débutante to débutante, having a vague persuasion that it was time he thought about getting married; looking in vain for a union of reasonable comeliness, sweet, stately innocence, and some indication of at least moderate intellectual powers.

If he could only have met Beatrice Cowdrey when she was seventeen!

That was the summer she and Lucia had crossed the lake in the canoe to the men's clubhouse, where, indeed, they had been respectfully enough treated in the main, but where they had first acquired discrimination in the matters of cigarettes and cocktails.

CHAPTER V.

It was in the spring—how often it is in the spring!—that Mallory's resistance broke down, and from avoidance of Beatrice he began to seek her out so persistently, to push her so close when they found themselves together, that her disconcerted self-esteem recovered again, and a happy excitement filled her days.

She couldn't imagine why he had been so stand-offish all winter. Certainly it couldn't have been that Lucia had really held him. Lucia, smart, pale, scarcely pretty, with her affectation of being sillier than she really was, might amuse a man, but, Beatrice considered, could never hope to inspire a real passion.

At any rate, he was frankly in pur-

suit of her, Beatrice Cowdrey, now. They danced together with an exclusiveness that would once have made a scandal, were together in whatever opportunities for intimate withdrawal the activities of the prolonged season's final weeks permitted. She showed herself, of course—however, not always gracious; she was far too experienced a coquette to let his path be uninterruptedly a smooth one.

But when, at the country-club dance in May, Dion begged her to come away with him to the pier of his own place close by and try his new motor boat by moonlight, Beatrice agreed at once. She liked motor boating and she liked misbehavior; she could not have resisted.

They walked away together over wet lawns, hearing the sound of dance music grow faint behind them. Dion took her to a small iron gate set in the high, vine-covered wall that divided his grounds from those of the club, and then for a little way under the black tops of trees, between whose trunks the water gleamed tranquilly. Across the lake, when they had come down to it, Beatrice could see a light or two not yet out in the Cowdrey's summer cottage, where already the younger girls and their governess were established, where she was to follow in a few days' time.

The Wanderer was built for speed; in a seaway she would soon have been in difficulties, but on the placid lake she was at home, shooting with the swiftness of a water spider over the surface, and her progress was as nearly noiseless as a motor boat's can be.

"She's perfect—I love her!" Beatrice declared.

"So do I. Will you come away with me in her—not go back at all—go on, out of the lake through the canal, to the river and on, always on—if we like, to the sea? It could be done."

"Ah, let's! It's not safe, Mr. Mallory, to offer such invitations to me!

I might accept. How she rips up the water! See our waves breaking on the shore back there! How warm it is! I should like to go swimming to-night."

"Would you like to? Then do it! Is there any folly like refusing one's self an innocent pleasure? I'll stop the boat and we'll swim together—in the moonlight. Come—shall I dare you to? Lucia Powell assures me that you have never taken a dare."

"Then please don't dare me. It would be a pity to spoil a perfect record, and really——"

"I should love to see your white arms, flashing wet in the moonlight! You'd give me a picture of a naiad, to remember always. Why, it would give us both an incomparable memory, and no one on earth but ourselves would ever know——"

"We'd scandalize the fishes—it cannot be!"

"I didn't think you were so conventional." He had stopped the engine; they had made the circuit of the lake and were floating now on the opposite side from the clubhouse, not a quarter of a mile from the shore where the Cowdreys' cottage stood half hid in pines, its last light extinguished now and the clean black slant of the roof alone telling Beatrice's accustomed eyes that it was at hand.

"Oh, I'm disappointed in you!" he repeated.

"We ought to be going back, really," she said coldly; she could not have explained why his persistence displeased her, since she would bathe with him in a few weeks' time, in a bathing suit already bought and highly satisfactory to her, which was as revealing as any garment could well be.

They had circumnavigated the lake, had drifted and argued and flirted, had been gone from the country club for perhaps an hour.

"You don't want to go back yet!" he begged her.

"I do, Mr. Mallory—really!"

He stepped obediently to the wheel, maneuvered it. Nothing occurred. A second attempt produced some furious revolutions of the propeller, growing rapidly irregular, fainting, ceasing. Dion frowned down at the refractory engine of the boat.

"She's stalled!" he announced presently. "I can't do anything with her. These motor-boat engines are the very dickens, and I'm afraid I'm no mechanical genius. I am more distressed than I can say."

"Nonsense—of course you can fix her!"

"I believe the gas is out." He inspected the gasoline tank with an anxious face. "Yes, it is! *Well!*"

"Dion Mallory, do you mean to say you asked me to come out here without troubling to see if you had enough gas?"

"Please don't scold me! It was just a sudden inspiration to ask you, and when you agreed, I was too happy to think of details like gas. What does it matter, anyhow? There's the moon up in the sky, and the pines leaning down to the water to try to hear what we say—don't let them hear us wrangling. It's love making they want to listen to."

"Well, I don't!" said Beatrice, but without conviction.

"Ah—you do! And if you do or you don't, I'm afraid you're going to have to. Beatrice——"

He dropped on the gunwale close to her, leaned over her, laid a hand lightly on her shoulder, between whose firm flesh and his hand only a wisp of colored georgette intervened.

"When, in this mad, bad, old world, two people have something for each other, shan't they give it? Shan't they give pleasure, make beauty, where they can? I love you for your daring, your unconvention, the quality in you that challenges and denies, and because a

man can't think of you as that tame creature, a wife!"

She had a little shock at that—not think of her as a wife! But it would be a figure of speech. She smiled subtly, let him stoop and kiss her arm.

"I love you, I love you!"

She murmured something, she did not know what, in half acceptance, half response. He went on:

"Isn't it an ugly thing, Beatrice—isn't it abominable, that the woman who *gives* in love, for the most part, is the woman who has to be an Indian giver to do it, the married woman who dares because she's safe, whatever happens? It is my dream to have a love affair of a different, cleaner sort, with a girl who gives open-eyed, what is her own to give; who doesn't bargain; who isn't afraid! Why, I despaired of ever finding her! But *you*——"

"I am not sure whether I quite understand," she said unsteadily, for his kisses, sliding upward on her arm, had set her pulses jumping.

"I want a love that's unsoiled and unspoiled, Beatrice—and I've come to you for it. What has love got to do with contracts and social ceremonies and newspaper notices—and houses and furniture and domesticity? But the alternative to that has been to steal love, and that will be the only alternative until all girls are free and brave like you. Will you love me, Beatrice? Do you love me?"

"Dion," she said desperately, "stop talking nonsense and think instead how you are going to get me back to the dance. The gas can't be all out! Or you have more with you, or some oars or something!"

Inwardly she was suffocating with anger, with a sense of outrage that he should formulate such a proposition to her, and she was not the less furious because she felt herself responding only too surely to the emotional side of the argument. Crazy, beautiful hours of

love, such as they could make of this one in the white moonlight, attracted her as much as they did him, lured her cruelly. But where, then, would be the brilliant marriage, the smashing social triumph over all those who had ever spoken slightly of her; the assured future to which, in these last weeks, she had accustomed herself to look forward so confidently?

She felt sick with mortification, angry to the point of recklessness, to the need for violent action; yet the advanced point of view he had assumed to be hers as well as his, his use of words like "freedom" and "courage," made it impossible for her to denounce him with the ready thunders of conventional morality. She had to do something!

She sprang up, pushing him away with a hand thrust against his waistcoat, under which, even in the instant's contact, she was made aware of his heart's plunging, and faced him.

"You positively can't make this wretched boat go?"

"I'm not a mechanical genius," he repeated obstinately. "I can't do a thing with her."

"Then——"

She was on the gunwale in one swift movement; in the next moment she had slipped gently overboard, lowering herself into the water without a splash and with the greatest care, to avoid wetting her hair.

CHAPTER VI.

It was astonishing how quickly Malory was able to master his obstinate engine.

She had not swum half a dozen strokes before the beat of the motor sounded behind her, to be shut off again instantly as the boat shot ahead under the impetus of the first turns of the propeller.

"Beatrice—for God's sake!"

The water did not feel cold to her

hot blood, and her light garments scarcely hampered her. She was an excellent swimmer, and she could have laughed now at his predicament as he begged her to come into the boat again, unwilling himself to leave it and face the greater difficulty of hoisting her in, dripping, from the water's level.

"I was a clumsy idiot—anything you like! Only let me take you back now, take you home where you can put yourself to bed! Where in Heaven's name do you think you're going—and what will you do when you get there? Tread water—give me your hand! You can dry yourself in the cabin forward. I'll do any mortal thing you say!"

She spoke coolly.

"Then take your ridiculous boat and go home. You told me you couldn't make it go—lied, I suppose—for your own purposes. Well, I am looking after myself now—since I didn't choose to drift about in your boat till daybreak. Good night, Mr. Mallory!"

"Beatrice!"

"I shall save my breath to swim with."

He came overside at that and, swimming strongly, reached her in a few strokes.

"I'm punished! Rather drastically, and too much at your expense. Come back now—don't carry a joke too far!"

She said nothing.

"After all," he ventured presently with a half laugh, "after all, we *are* swimming together, aren't we? So it might be said to be *I* that score! Your arms are more beautiful than I imagined them!"

Beatrice swam on in disdainful silence, vouchsafing no reply to his impertinences. The black shore line drew imperceptibly nearer. Dion kept a parallel progress with hers, at a few yards' distance, remonstrating, questioning, in vain.

He was genuinely puzzled, disconcerted less by her lunatic action in taking to the water than by her reception

of his love-making, to the earlier stages of which she had been so hospitable. What was it that was at fault in his calculations? He hadn't even yet kissed her face—and she who, to his conviction, had permitted this to other men, was behaving like the fantastically prudish heroine of a melodrama when trapped by the villain.

Beatrice's foot touched bottom, and she stood up. Her wet, fragile dress lay around the seductive contours of her perfect young body like the wrinkled draperies of Attic sculpture; the moonlight turned the edges of her to silver and set sparks in the drops that rained from her. She might have been Aphrodite rising from the waters. Dion stood up, too, and faced her, ridiculously dripping, his hair—he had not been careful, as she had been, to keep his head above the surface—plastered, with infelicitous effect, straight down on his forehead. The clothing of men takes no magic from water and moonlight. He was a ludicrous figure enough, and Beatrice, looking at him, could not restrain a cruel little laugh.

"It's been very kind of you to see me home!" she said mockingly. "But as it's so late, I'm afraid I really cannot ask you to come in!"

She waded ashore, climbed the bank, disappeared among the trees.

Mallory, wondering whether it was or wasn't his duty to follow her, made out, a moment later, the roof of a boathouse to his left, and concluded that Miss Cowdrey's madness was not without its method.

"Well, I'll be——" he ejaculated, standing in water to his knees and staring at the spot where her light figure had disappeared.

He had been furious with her and with himself. But the enchanting vision she had presented to him just now was not of a quality to be remembered with anger. He felt a little dizzy, instead, as a man might who has encour-

tered a beautiful witch, a possibly malevolent but radiant fairy. A real humility invaded him, together with a touch of fear.

What if this girl *were* a law unto herself; if she *did* things that would have been outrageous in others? Beauty like hers gave her the royal prerogative, and it was not for men to judge her—men, her slaves and victims!

He swam slowly, his teeth chattering a little now, back to the abandoned and drifting *Wanderer*.

CHAPTER VII.

Beatrice rang and pounded at the door of the house, and presently a kimonoed lady, with her front hair in steel wavers, descended and opened cautiously the length of the chain.

"It's I, Miss Gardiner—Beatrice Cowdrey!"

"What! *Alone*—at this time of night!" The governess' fingers shook as she fumbled over the chain. "What is the matter, Miss Cowdrey? I trust your father——"

"Oh, nothing's happened! I was boating near here and had a ducking. It was a good thing it happened so near home!"

"Oh, my *dear* Miss Cowdrey! You must have a hot bath at once, and I will make you some hot lemonade."

"No, no—I haven't time. I have to get back to a dance. Let's see—what time is it? Are the children all asleep?"

"*Long ago*—of course! And, really, do let me beg you not to be so imprudent!"

"Well—Irene will just have to wake up, that's all! Just be getting me a cocktail, will you? I'll be in Irene's room, dressing."

Not troubling to knock, Beatrice opened the door of her sister's bedroom with a reassuring "It's me!" and pressed the electric-light button which, oddly

enough, showed the girl's bed empty, and no sign of its proper occupant. The older sister raised her eyebrows at this, but scarcely in surprise. It wasn't to be expected that Irene, at eighteen, should follow Miss Gardiner's rules too closely. The little clock on the mantel said ten minutes to twelve only.

Beatrice moved about the room swiftly, rifling her sister's bureau drawers for silk underwear and lingerie and stockings, her closet for slippers and the child's most grown-up evening dress, a quite passable affair of orchid georgette over satin, whose purchase she had opposed at the time on the ground of unsuitability, but not inexorably, she was glad now to remember. Holding her spoils far out from her own wet neighborhood, she dripped on into Irene's bathroom, to emerge after an interval whose shortness would have astounded her maid, dry, clothed, bejeweled again with ornaments that had been dried on a bath towel, *soignée* to the last detail.

But where could that bad child be? A glancing memory of her own evening excursions across the lake many summers ago came back to Beatrice; she moved to the window and looked out. This room had been hers at that time, and the roof of the porch just under it was accessible from the branches of an easily climbed tree.

Voices below her from the porch steps——

Beatrice listened intently. Irene's voice, of course, and the other—the man's? It came again, rather high-pitched for a man's voice, complacent, suggesting somehow that its owner's person was at least comfortably rounded—the voice of Clarence Winslow!

She stood back from the window, indignant with both Clarence and her sister, but seeing her own momentary advantage in the incident. Catching up a coat, she turned from the room, met Miss Gardiner toiling upstairs with

a cocktail and the hot lemonade whose acceptance she still hoped for, caught and drained the cocktail, and irrupted upon the porch with telling effect.

"Irene Louisa Cowdrey!" she said terribly. "What are you doing out here at this time of night? And who, may I ask, is with you?"

"It's only Mr. Winslow," Irene said sulkily, poor Clarence being too paralyzed for speech.

"I thought you were at the country club, Clarence." Her voice was less implacable, since she had a service to demand of the man.

"I was. Then I got some good news—that is, well, it was good news, because I never laid eyes on the old jossler. Well——"

"Do try to talk sense, Clarence!"

"It was like this, Beatrice—if you'll only let a fellow get it out! They phoned me at the club that this great-uncle of mine was dying, wanted me to start East to see him right away. Well, no sooner did I get back to the house than there was another wire—he was dead. Well, I didn't want to go back to the dance—seemed kind of heartless, what? I had to talk to somebody about it, and I've been out here once or twice lately to see Miss Irene, and not being out I knew she'd be home, and it wasn't so terribly late when I got here. Maybe I ought to have gone home before, but I was pretty excited about this thing—it isn't every day I get left five million dollars!"

"Five—million—dollars!" Beatrice sat down weakly on the porch rail.

"On the level—five million berries, Miss Irene's been telling me what I ought to do with 'em."

"Has she, indeed! Irene, go to bed."

Her household was accustomed to obey Beatrice's brusque orders, and perhaps by this time the younger girl was sleepy.

"Well—good night, Mr. Winslow!"

"Good night," he said blankly, brightening, however, when Beatrice, her sister gone, turned to him with real cordiality.

"I do congratulate you, Clarence. Why didn't one ever hear of this gorgeous possibility before?"

"Why, they never told me! Thought it would discourage me from working, or something. And the old jossler was only sixty—might have lived another twenty years!"

"I see. Well—I'm going to ask you to do something for me, Clarence. Never mind about it's being heartless. After all, nobody knows about this but ourselves, do they?"

"Not a soul but the family—and you two girls."

"Well, I want you to take me back to the dance. You've got your car here, I suppose? You needn't stay. Just take me in. Will you?"

"Why, of course, if you say so, Beatrice. Come on—the car's down by the gate."

She walked to it beside him, her head busy with new thoughts and plans.

Clarence Winslow, fool though he might be, was a respectable enough choice now that he had five millions, and she felt that the one adequate retribution for Dion Mallory's offense would be to hear without delay that she was engaged to another man, the one tolerable vantage point for herself, from which to meet him next, that of an engaged girl. The dignity of such a position, of course, was in direct ratio to the importance of the man in the case, and Clarence would be important in a way—now. Also, absurdly enough, young Irene's presumption in flirting with even a discarded lover of Beatrice's not only called for punishment, but, in some odd way, gave value to the man himself. Others than Irene would be offering a new consideration to Winslow, now that he was rich, and Beatrice decided that, on all accounts, it would be best to at-

tack with a promptitude whose crudeness he could be relied upon not to perceive.

"I am so glad that you've had this good fortune!" she said sweetly, taking his arm for the walk down the shaded avenue to the waiting car. "But I'm a little hurt, perhaps, that you told it first to my little sister instead of to me. Weren't you sure of my interest in you—my friendship for you?"

"Why, Beatrice Cowdrey! Have you forgotten the perfectly brutal things you said to me at the Powell's last fall? I haven't dared speak to you, hardly, since. I wish to Heaven I could believe you took an interest in me—but I've seen precious little indication lately!"

"Men never understand a girl, I suppose! I remember that night you speak of perfectly. You'd had too much to drink, and I was angry with you because I hated to see you lower yourself. Do you suppose I care when other men get in that condition? I simply ignore them. I scolded you because I—like you!"

She could see his ears grow pink with pleasure in the light from the automobile lamps.

"Beatrice——" he stammered. "Is it any use asking you again if you could ever do more than like? You know I've always been simply nuts about you! I don't think there's anybody in this town to touch you, and I don't believe there is in New York, either! If you'd say you'd marry me, to-night—on top of getting this money—gee, it *would* be a night, wouldn't it?"

"How absurd you are, Clarence! You make it sound as if there could be a connection between a girl accepting you and your happening to inherit some money! Have you really got such a poor opinion of yourself, that you think no girl could love you if you were poor?"

"Well, I know I'm not much—not

specially brainy or anything. And a queen like you—Beatrice! Please don't get my hopes all worked up, if you're not going to say yes!"

"I *am* going to say yes," she said slowly.

They drove around the lake with Winslow's arm hugging her waist, his sentimental dribblings in her ear. Beatrice paid little attention to them. She would reënter the ballroom with an escort, and if she had cut half a dozen dances, it was not worse than she had often done before. Her change of costume would suggest a serious accident to her dress as explanation of her absence, and if Mallory, too, should have returned, he would see her again in her panoply, gay, triumphant, as always.

And, though the formal announcement, of course, would not be made for some weeks, she would make sure, by confidences in the proper quarters, that by to-morrow, at latest, he should learn of her engagement to Clarence Winslow.

CHAPTER VIII.

The news of Clarence's wealth and of Beatrice Cowdrey's belated acceptance of him was, indeed, known everywhere within a few days.

Irene was chagrined, as her sister had meant her to be, over the easy defection of Clarence, but there was more compensation than Beatrice would have been pleased to know, in the prospect of a home without a tyrant, of drawing-rooms whose mistress would be the débutante of next winter, and in the reversion of the card plate inscribed with magnificent brevity: "Miss Cowdrey," instead of the cadette's: "Miss Irene Louisa Cowdrey."

Dion heard the news at first with disbelief, later with angry rebelliousness. He was far more in love with Beatrice, after his rebuff, than he had been before it, and he by no means accepted his defeat as final. It was ab-

surd to suppose that the sorceress who had enthralled him under the midnight moon could marry that commonplace cub.

He revolved the situation in his mind, unwilling to relinquish her, but no readier than he had been before to invite to his mother's place a girl capable of Beatrice's vagaries. Life he knew was long, love not so long. He seemed to have entered an impasse, from which it would be better to back gracefully out, but whenever he reached this conclusion, his augmented passion for the girl surged up and proclaimed it impossible.

It was three days after her engagement had been announced that, having made sure by telephone that she was at home and alone, he called on her.

His card was brought to Beatrice in the upstairs sitting room upon which Irene already looked with the eye of a prospective proprietor; she took it up between thumb and finger, and said mechanically, "Tell him I'll be down."

When Wallace had withdrawn she sat staring at the little pasteboard oblong that bore Dion's name, her underlip caught between her even white teeth. The last ten days had been for Beatrice a period of strange new emotions, some of them anguishing, some bitterly satisfactory. Her old secure peace of mind, her old complacent pleasure in ministering to and considering her body's beauty, seemed to have slipped away from her, to have become lost in this seething turmoil of uncomfortable intensities. Mingled with her other feelings was a certain puzzled resentment that she should suffer; she was twenty-six years old, and had been in love, surely, often enough before!

The explanation, of course, though she did not find it until later, was that she had never been in love before. She had fancied herself in love whenever a man whose looks she liked and whose clothes she could approve had made love

to her, or when—as in the curious case of Joe Manice—some salient peculiarity marked the man or her meeting with him, and gave the needed stimulus to her spirited imagination.

But not until the electric light she had turned on had showed Dion Mallory to her dazzled eyes, Dion quick and conquering as a stage hero, and as nonchalant, had Beatrice encountered a man qualified to inspire her with a genuine passion. His marked avoidance of her all winter had provided a long period of incubation for the suddenly conceived emotion; she had read and reread his poems and plays, watched him surreptitiously, as a woman can do successfully and a man almost never, whenever they were in the same room, and thought about him constantly, though not, then, with real pain. That had commenced only with the astounding anticlimax of his love-making, at the end of those spring weeks when the beautiful and worldly Miss Cowdrey had lived in a sweet intoxication of love, like any unsophisticated villager.

He hadn't, after all, wanted to marry her. She was bewildered still, in contemplation of that evening, at a loss to understand why he should have fancied it possible that she would accede to his suggestion; why—if, as he said, he loved her—he hadn't at once asked her to marry him. She was rich and beautiful, and if her social position was not quite as unassailable as Mallory's own, still it was only a few steps lower, and a tangible affair enough.

Of the real reason for his hesitation she hadn't an inkling, for the truth was that the personal conduct of the talked-about Miss Cowdrey would have borne favorable comparison with that of many a demure damsel who was not discussed, because the tongues of those who might have talked were tied by the very favors received, while there was no one, actually, who was not at liberty to talk freely about Beatrice. The girl

would say anything, break any rule of convention, just as her father would coolly fracture the laws of the land, from sheer carelessness of outside restraints. But she herself set up for her own guidance the strictest canons; for instance—and this gives the measure of them all—she had permitted familiarities of minor kinds to many men, but she had never allowed any man to kiss her mouth.

Now, Dion Mallory, whom she had meant to be done with, was downstairs asking to see her. She had not hesitated a moment about receiving him, for no matter what prudence and will decide in these cases, the natural current of longing to be with the beloved must always be the stronger. But she had a great deal to do before she went downstairs.

Heartache and sleepless nights were making her rather pale, and she had to add a touch of color to cheeks and lips, to twist and pull at her coiffure till she achieved perfection, finally to change from the white skirt and blouse, in which she had played tennis till lunch time, into a fluffy, peach-colored afternoon frock that looked happy and girlish and engaged.

Winslow had given her a perfectly commonplace ring—a diamond, probably the largest and most expensive solitaire ever flashed in the city.

Dion, his mind full of the moon-rayed goddess who had mocked him against the background of black pines and shadowed water, felt a little shock of disappointment when Miss Cowdrey came in, modish, neat-haired, her fingers sparkling with nothing more romantic than diamonds. But when she sat down in one of her superb, unstudied attitudes, and her round, bare arm slung out on its cushion a few feet only from his own knee, he caught with her perfume a breath of that magical night, heard again a note of Pan's pipes, and his heart quickened its beats.

"So one's to congratulate Clarence Winslow!" he said rather harshly.

"Please! Oh—and me, too! You must congratulate me!"

"I will not—nor him either! He's pouring out a dose of misery for himself in marrying you—who don't love him, and never will!"

"Mr. Mallory! Really——"

"Mr. Mallory—really! How dare you call me Mr. Mallory? How dare you get yourself engaged to that utterly insignificant little simulacrum of a man—you, Beatrice, who love me?"

"I think you must be crazy!" she cried, whitening now under the rouge which made her loss of color imperceptible to him. "Love you! Where did you get that fantastically conceived notion? If I loved you, should I be marrying somebody else? It's usually safe to assume that one loves the person one is going to marry!"

"Fantastically conceived I am, then," he said grimly, "for I've the notion strongly rooted, that you love me, as I, Beatrice"—his voice softened to the moving note in which he uttered all such speeches—"I love you! Beatrice, darling, my darling——" He laid a possessive hand upon the white rondure of her arm, to which his eyes had kept returning since she had come in.

"You've no right to talk to me like that." She tried feebly to draw her arm away, but his hand followed it. "I am engaged to Clarence Winslow, and you know it!"

"But you don't love him."

"I do love him, I tell you."

"Liar!" he accused with the calmness of utter conviction.

"Really!" she gasped.

She was at a disadvantage in her conflict with him. Any other man attempting a tenth of his impertinences she would have crushed and routed, but she so loved the touch of his fingers, his voice, brusque and tender in turns, the blue lightnings of the eyes she could

meet only by seconds, that she was quite unable to feint, deny, brazen out with her usual skill and assurance.

"You love me! And loving me, you've gone and engaged yourself to that shrimp! If I did right"—Irish idioms were apt to spring to Mallory's lips when he was much moved—"if I did right I'd beat you for it. What's the use of denials between us? We both know the thing that is—that we love each other. Observe, you've not yet said, in so many words, that you don't love me. Of course not! Your lips would refuse to utter the lie!"

"I do not love you!" said Beatrice loudly.

He answered nothing to that; merely bent his head closer and scrutinized her face. She kept her lids lowered, but even though she did not meet it, his gaze was an anguishing embarrassment to her; she felt stripped under some intolerable ray, and presently, to her angry dismay, felt herself beginning to tremble perceptibly from head to foot.

He spoke at last, slowly.

"I think you are not speaking the truth. But I'll accept it. I'll go away and make no more demands on you, if you——" He paused.

"If——" she repeated faintly.

"If you'll let me kiss you once—on your mouth—and afterward look me in the eyes and say that again."

Her bosom rose high, dropped; she hesitated, frowning. Could the thing be done? If it were done and done successfully, she would have torn the victory out of the hands that were now crushing her with such intolerable complacency in cruelty, and she wanted the kiss, of course—she would have the kiss to remember. Moreover, she knew by experience that a man indulged is a man weakened, and she might presently find Dion at her mercy. Nor would the recollection of such a kiss make his nights the easier, if, after it was given, she repulsed him definitively.

She hated, too, to take a dare.

The inspiring example of Cleopatra floated to her, and her reception in the evening of lovers consigned to death in the morning. She tried for a spark of that unscrupulous enchantress' spirit, opened dark eyes defiantly on Dion, and breathed:

"All right!"

The next moment she was being strained to him with a roughness that wonderfully satisfied some unguessed need of her nature, and upon her mouth his mouth had descended, to press and cling and sting. The world whirled. She tingled; her body became exquisitely, unbearably, blissfully alive to the finger tips, and all her reasoned conclusions and resolves floated off to some limbo of irrelevant things.

He released her, and she put cold hands, that shook uncontrollably, to a face that flamed. She wanted of a sudden now to cry. Yet she felt wildly happy, felt as if thrown up with him on some rose-lit mountaintop, dizzy with the meteorlike rush away from familiar things, but clasping tight in her hand the key to human destinies.

"Now," he challenged, unsteadily enough, "look at me, and say—that—again!"

She shook her head weakly, groped for his hand, and carried it to her cheek. His fingers moved upon her face caressingly for a moment, then, with an ejaculation of wrath, he caught her other hand and gripped it painfully, staring down at Clarence's ring upon it.

"Take that thing off!" he ordered peremptorily.

She started to obey him, with a little thrill of pleasure in the harshness of the command. But the ring was tight and did not move easily, and when with a sound of impatience he caught at her hand and began to pull at it himself, hurting her finger, a small surge of resentment rose in her. She might be a degenerate daughter of Cleopatra, piti-

fully at the mercy of the man who had stirred her, instead of proudly able to repudiate him, callously indifferent to his fate, but she must show some spark of independence or she would not be Beatrice Cowdrey.

"Let my hand alone! You're hurting me! After all, I think I'll wear this ring until—I have another engagement ring to put on instead!"

She did not even mean it as a challenge to him to profess "honorable" intentions; after that kiss it had not occurred to her that there could be any longer a question of either one of them marrying any one else. But Dion, perhaps the further from wishing to marry her for the addition of Winslow to her once privileged and then discarded fiancés, was utterly taken aback by her implication.

"I'll give you diamonds and rubies and emeralds!" he said quickly. "Even an engagement ring if you like—any mortal thing except a wedding ring. I'm not asking you to marry me!"

"You're—not——"

"I love you. I want—you! We have something for each other, and we'll give it to each other, but it's got nothing to do with marriage—it's outside marriage. Don't be a fool, Beatrice! Don't you know your own gifts, you daughter of Aphrodite, you delirious, delicious witch? How could you be a man's wife? Can you see yourself in a nursery?"

She stared at him, able now, to her own surprise, to face those odd, oblong eyes of him, blazing with blue light though they were.

"I think we've been misunderstanding each other," she said slowly. "You were waiting, weren't you, for me to say to you that I don't love you? Well, Mr. Mallory, I *don't* love you!" She uttered the words without a tremor, having drawn back against her cushions and put space between them.

"What the——" Dion began after a stupefied pause.

He became aware at the same moment of the noiseless Wallace approaching, with a card tray which he offered to Beatrice.

"Why, of course!" she exclaimed clearly. "Always, Wallace, show Mr. Winslow right in, wherever I happen to be."

Dion stood up mechanically, and Beatrice hastily tidied her somewhat disordered hair. Neither uttered a syllable until Clarence broke in boisterously, and the girl with a rapturous smile such as his appearance had never before called to her face, caught his hand and held it.

"Go on, kiss me, Clarence!" she laughed up at him. "Never mind Mr. Mallory. He's just going!"

For the second time within the half hour—for the second time in her life—a man's lips kissed Beatrice Cowdrey's mouth, as Dion Mallory hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER IX.

If Beatrice had been unhappy before the rout of Mallory, she was after it plunged into a defiant misery greater in degree and kind than anything she had yet known. Her hitherto carelessly flourishing pride, which had scarcely encountered a check of any sort, was wounded as deeply as her love.

Why did not Dion Mallory wish to marry her? Was the fault in him, she asked herself, or in her? Many men, of course, didn't care for domesticity as such, but since time's beginnings the male animal, however restive, has let himself be harnessed between shafts, for the sake of possession of the desired woman. She couldn't doubt that Dion desired her, and it was the one consoling certainty that she carried out of the afternoon's ordeal. Was it that he did not desire her enough? Or was it possibly—the conjecture was inevitable

—that in that romantic, veiled period of his life abroad, he had married already; perhaps married a French woman, hence, probably, a Roman Catholic, who would refuse to give him a divorce?

Beatrice felt sure, at times, that in something like this familiar novelist's dilemma, lay the explanation. And if he had only proclaimed it, only been frank with her, she thought, she might have met him on the grounds he wished, have agreed to give up Clarence, to love him in secret, to snatch what beauty and happiness they two could give each other without society's knowledge.

She was prudent enough to think this only in wakeful moments at night; to be glad, in her saner daylight hours, that she was not to be tempted into jeopardizing her social position, that she was to have the éclat of an entirely respectable, an even enviable marriage—for if Clarence left something to be desired as a husband, look what other girls had to put up with—and the pleasure of choosing and furnishing a house of her own, where there would be no little girls underfoot, no inconveniently pretty Irene putting forth claims to consideration; where she might entertain with all brilliance, and perhaps gradually force the straitest doors in society to open before her.

The wedding was to be, of course, an ostentatious affair, in the church highest in social favor, with the now reconciled Lucia as maid of honor, Irene figuring among the bridesmaids, and Gladys, with a corresponding small Winslow acting as flower bearers. The date was set by Beatrice for the first week in October, anticipating the season in order that after the wedding trip, she might return to enjoy as much of it as possible in the character of Mrs. Clarence Winslow. The intervening summer was none too long for the accumulation of a suitable trousseau, and Beatrice went twice to New York in the hottest weather.

She spent the rest of her time at the lake cottage, where Clarence Winslow had practically taken up his residence.

Her prospective brother-in-law was immensely popular with Gladys and Gwendolen, for whom he brought bonbons and other presents at every visit. Irene, on the other hand, received him coldly, refused candy if she knew that he had presented it, and was as nearly as possible rude to him.

She was once reported by Gladys to have been heard crying in the night.

"I was reading a very sad book," said the girl defiantly.

"Your light was out."

"I don't need a light to cry by. I'd finished the book. I should like to know what you think I have to cry about, except the sorrows of people in stories. I'm coming out the twenty-sixth of November, I'm to have the same dress allowance that Beatrice has, and I've lost six pounds this summer!"

She counted the loss gain, of course, being a girl of her period, but she had been slight enough before, and was nowadays less pretty than she had been, rather a pathetic and, the children told her, getting to be as cross as Beatrice herself.

That any one should lose sleep over Clarence Winslow would have seemed to Beatrice merely laughable, but he had been her young sister's first considerable nibble, the first man of anything like mature years who had sought her out, and his cheerful disposition and boyish readiness to be amused made him a delightful companion for a girl whose own demands were slight. Moreover, if he had acquired value for Beatrice because she suspected that Irene had wanted him, the older girl's actual acceptance of him had endowed him for Irene with a prestige he could have gained in no other way.

Accordingly, she nursed a broken heart, sang sad songs at the piano, and found her only comfort in watching the

scales creep down when she weighed herself each week.

CHAPTER X.

Dion, meantime, was at grips with his own self-frustrated passion.

Beatrice's surmises about his past in Paris were to a degree true; he was not married, but he had certainly been ravaged by emotional experiences which he had then supposed had left him no heart to love with. There had been weeks of happiness with the woman he had called in his poems Gisèle, and then there had been an ugly dénouement, a scandal hushed with difficulty, and a wiser Dion, taking oath never to love again, unless a good and circumspect young girl, whom he might make his wife in all openness and propriety, with full confidence in her unexceptional behavior.

Beatrice, we know, did not come up to these specifications. But the one predictable thing about love is that it will spring to life with utter disregard of the conveniences, and even too often of the proprieties. Dion was in the power now of something much stronger than himself, of something that he resisted only at the price of a torment that drove him on many nights to go out and walk himself into a blind fatigue, to walk often until dawn, long miles into the outlying country sometimes, at others through the lit streets of the city.

In the hope of escape from thoughts of Beatrice he went out one night along the water front and paced the deserted docks under a black sky sagging low and heavy with rain that would not fall.

Her marriage was imminent now, set for a date in October, and this was one of the last of September nights. Dion, no better than any other lover, liked the idea of Beatrice given over finally to Clarence Winslow, toward whom his feelings had been already murderous,

when he saw her offer her lips to her fiancé, so soon after they had been yielded to himself.

She had been engaged before. Lucia had told him—twice. But in each of these instances the man had been poor, the engagement scarcely serious. Moreover, he had seen neither of the men, and toward them he felt only a vague antagonism, mixed with some pity. The man he resented most was, oddly enough, not Winslow but the political trouble-maker, Joe Manice.

Again and again, beside troubling visions of Beatrice glimmering wet in the moonlight, Beatrice, in rosy georgette, trembling under his conqueror's gaze, rose that other vision of a tumbled, flushed girl in an evening gown, and beside her the uncouth but virile demagogue. Joe Manice was coming to be more of a power in the city these days, and it was by no means certain that at the next election the party of wealth and conservatism would override him so easily. One saw his picture in the newspapers from time to time, and when Dion saw it he had always to resist an impulse to crumple the page savagely. It was the thought of familiarities permitted by Beatrice to this man, of the disgrace of any connection or acquaintanceship between them, that most of all had given him pause, when his need of her had brought him to the contemplation of marriage.

He moved away presently from his station at a wharf's end, crossed a drift of railway tracks, and turned into one of the downtown streets, dark now except for an occasional arc lamp, for it was well after midnight. Only from the windows of one building light streamed, and as Mallory drew abreast of it, its door opened and showed a lighted, dingy hall, and on the threshold the figure of Joe Manice himself.

Dion stopped short involuntarily, and Manice, seeing him close at hand in full illumination, came down the steps with

outstretched hand and a laugh of recognition.

"You're the guy that let me out, that night last year, when Powell's lot kidnaped me! I'm sure glad to run into you again, Mr.— I never knew your name."

"Mallory," said Dion mechanically. The man's unexpected cordiality had suggested to him a temptation against which he knew that he ought to struggle, against which in reality he was scarcely struggling at all.

"Well, say, Mr. Mallory," Manice went on. "I've been in conference with some friends of mine, working late—they're still at it. And say, come along and have a drink with me. There's a place I know, two or three blocks from here."

"Well," said Dion. The two men walked along together a few paces, and then Mallory, despising himself, spoke.

"That was a funny meeting of ours—that other one. Do you know"—he could not, after all, name her—"that young lady who was there, very well? Ever see anything of her nowadays?"

"See anything of a dame like that?" Manice stared; his voice gave Dion the measure of his surprise. "Me? Say, do you think my middle name's Van As-torbilt?"

"You seemed to know each other fairly well—then. It was she, you remember, who wanted you let out?"

"Yes, and it was you that let me out, and that fed my face for me, and I'm not the guy to forget it. If there's ever anything Joe Manice can do for you, Mr. Mallory, you remember you've only got to say the word, and it's done."

"But say, that lady!"

He paused a moment, and Dion, waiting, held his breath.

Manice released a sigh.

"She's the goods, all right. You can say what you like about it, you take a lady off the top shelf of all, like her, and you've got an article to make the

ordinary Jane look foolish. Some sport! And some queen to look at, too. Well, I'm a married man."

Dion turned cold.

"I hit her," said Manice unexpectedly.

"You—hit—"

"Uh-huh," repeated the other soberly. "Of course, it wasn't done on purpose, it was just like when you came in. I grabbed her and choked her and pasted her a good one on the jaw. Gee! I felt sick when I got the light on and had a look at her! Well, she was just like you, sir. She believed in fighting square, she told me, and she'd come in there—a girl like that, bucking the gang that owns the town—just to let me out. Wouldn't you think she'd want me beat to death after what I did to her? But, no, sir! 'Don't you worry,' she says to me, 'you shall be let out,' and let out I was. Well, I don't know as there's any action in my life I'd rather recall than the way I pasted her. If you see her any time, soon, Mr. Mallory, you might tell her same as what I said to you—only in her case it goes double—that if there's anything she wants me to do, ever, she can just slip me the word!"

Dion said nothing. He was, perhaps, for the moment, unable to speak.

"Here's the place I was telling about. Casey's got some regular beer, still, none of your one halves, nor even two seventy-five. We'll get our drinks now inside of two shakes."

"I don't want a drink," Mallory said.

"Don't want a drink. Then whatcha come over here for?"

"For the pleasure of your company and conversation. No—I can't have a drink. Seriously, I should be afraid to. But shake hands again, Mr. Manice!"

"That nut has the grip of a gorilla," was Manice's rueful comment as Mr. Casey opened to him, and Mallory drifted away into the dark.

CHAPTER XI.

Dion's revulsion of feeling was complete.

He cursed and detested his own vileness of mind, which had put so ugly an interpretation on a scene in which Beatrice had played the most creditable part. A blow! Who could have imagined a blow? Yet, he ought to have imagined it, to have imagined any far-fetched explanation, rather than to have supposed what he hated himself now for having been capable of supposing.

With what admirable sportsmanship she had behaved throughout, had set the pain and insult to herself aside, judged Manice's case on its own merits, and forgone even the easy revenge of withholding the help she was under no obligation to give! Mallory strode on through the silent streets into which a cold rain was now beginning to patter, luxuriating in his own abasement and in the rush of admiration and love for the girl.

The poison was out of his wound, with the knowledge he thought he had that she had never, after all, forgotten the distance between herself and this man of another class. He was almost happy as he walked, divided though he still was from Beatrice, and it might have been supposed, divided in all probability forever. It began to rain steadily, drenchingly, but he was serenely unaware that he was becoming wet; he was living over again every meeting he had had with her, every conversation, and it seemed to him that everywhere he had misread the daring of innocence for indelicate provocativeness, noble freedom for reprehensible rashness.

He remembered Lucia's slurs and the things that other people had repeated to him about the talked-of Miss Cowdrey, and he calmly discounted them all now for lies. In greater part, of course, they were so. A very beautiful girl does not arrogate to herself, in the eye

of society, a freedom that society does not countenance, without having much more said about her than is true. But there were grains of truth, too, in the things that were said about Beatrice.

She had been guilty of much rudeness and inconsideration, as well as a hardly justifiable defiance of appearances; she had had the cruelest possible effect upon the lives of several men who had loved her, and who would have suffered appreciably less if she had not taken pleasure in experimenting with their feelings considerably past the danger line, and she had, of course, been more than imprudent in the case of Manice, and actuated in that affair by no noble motives at all. And she had been consistently selfish in her home life, subordinating the comfort of everybody in the house to her own.

Nevertheless, Dion's new judgment of her was a juster one than that, for example, of Lucia Powell, who up to the last months had known her, possibly, better than any one in the world. For Beatrice's character, resisting every pressure till then brought to bear on it, had undergone lately the strongest molding forces in existence. She had loved and become dissatisfied with herself; she had suffered and had not known why. She was becoming, in the very essence of her, a different creature from the carelessly arrogant Miss Cowdrey, who had set out to lure Joe Manice to her feet.

It had been obvious enough to Mallory, of course, that Beatrice wished to be asked to marry him. He knew himself to be eminently eligible, and he knew that, not many months ago, he had possessed the power to stir her unmistakably, to force from her a response which he felt very sure was not given to Clarence Winslow. It was two weeks only before her wedding day, but if he understood Beatrice, that circumstance would present itself to her in the light of a detail.

He was not without hope, then, and now so fatuously enamored with the new image of the girl that he had built up, that he swung out of the downtown streets and walked up to Amos Cowdrey's house, which fronted, naturally, on the smartest of all circles. Beatrice very probably wasn't there at all. But it pleased him to think that she might be, and to guess at the bay windows of the second floor for hers.

The feverish excitement with which he watched them, and which probably prevented him from noticing that he was thoroughly wet, left him when he turned away at last and was followed by its natural sequel, a chill. He was far too ill the next day for the overtures to Beatrice which he had planned.

The day set for her wedding was drawing very near now; the invitations had been out for nearly a week, and all manner of material arrangements were completed. Beatrice had faced the prospect of marriage with Clarence Winslow apathetically, while it was still at some months' distance, but as it approached, she found herself, not indeed dreading it, but willingly withdrawing her thoughts from the consideration of some phases of it, to dwell instead on congenial questions of clothes and house furnishings. She soberly willed the fulfillment of her engagement, nevertheless, and intended in all sincerity to carry out her part.

It hadn't occurred to her that she had any present duties to Clarence, however, and she treated him now most often as cavalierly as before his inheritance had made him worthy of becoming her betrothed; it was quite enough for him, she considered, that he was going to be privileged to marry her.

Accordingly, when one afternoon he presented himself before the assembled family, grouped on an awninged side porch overlooking the lake, and offered tribute of candy and books, Miss Cowdrey from the sofa-hammock sneered

languidly at his choice of both, did not trouble herself to voice either gratitude or appreciation.

"This candy's no use to me, Clarence. Why can't you bring some that's fit to eat?" She lifted the lid of the elaborate box and looked inside with scornful distaste. "Here, feed it to the dog—unless the children would like some. They aren't particular!"

Clarence had reddened miserably at his failure to please.

"I'm sorry I'm such a dub. If you'll just let me know what you do want I'll be glad to bring it."

"That new French place is the only possible place in town. What are those books you brought? Oh, Clarence!" She broke into cruel mirth over their titles.

In an indignant little fluttering rush Irene had skirted the tea table and snatched the books from her sister's knee.

"'Love Is the Sum of It All'—I'm sure that's splendid! 'The Girl of the Limberlost'—I'm crazy to read that—and Harold Bell Wright's latest! If Beatrice doesn't want these, Clarence, I'll be ever so glad to have them!"

She caught the absurd books in their gay paper jackets to her bosom, and stood, slim in her white frock, breathing generous defense of Winslow, defiance of Beatrice, a wonderfully taking picture, with the rare color in her cheeks giving brilliance to her big eyes.

Clarence looked at her with gratitude, Beatrice with some wonder. Meantime the younger girls, with no thoughts of cushioning the situation for Clarence, with the directest views of self-interest, had sustained Irene's effort by falling on the despised box of candy, and were enjoying it unfeignedly.

Cheered for a moment only, Winslow's eyes returned to his fiancée, disdainful, and he said disconsolately: "But it was you I wanted to please, Beatrice!"

"And it doesn't mean anything at all to you, does it"—Irene's voice was fluty, high-pitched, cold—"if you succeed in pleasing—any of the rest of us?"

"Why, of course," he stammered, startled and uncomfortable. "Of course, it's natural I'd rather please Beatrice, isn't it?"

Irene didn't answer. Shrugging violently, she dropped the books she was still holding on to the table, careless that they landed obliquely, slid, and thudded to the ground. She circled widely to avoid passing too close to Winslow in her retreat, and disappeared into the house.

Beatrice's brutality to Clarence had only begun with her scorn of his offerings. She wouldn't come on the lake with him, wouldn't withdraw to any solitary spot where he might press for one of her rare kisses—he still dreamed, will dream perhaps to his last day, of that unmatched, fervent kiss she gave him before Dion Mallory—and criticized with destructive harshness every tentative plan or suggestion he had to offer for the new house, or for their honeymoon voyagings.

He took himself off at last, not having been asked to stay to dinner, and feeling, for a man who has scaled the improbable summit of his hopes, strangely depressed.

"Of course, Beatrice is the greatest ever," he thought as he motored home. "But I never did know anybody who made me feel such a perfect dub as she does!"

Irene did not present herself at dinner, and an odd wave of mingled solicitude and curiosity took Beatrice to her room soon after the meal.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked brusquely, when, after repeated knocks on a door she would have opened unceremoniously if it had not been locked, Irene turned the key on the inside.

"Nothing," said the child, but she was pale, and, Beatrice could see in the summer twilight, she had been crying probably for hours. An unwonted impulse of tenderness stirred the older girl.

"Look here, Irene," she said, pushing in and seating herself on the bed, which showed a depression where Irene had lain; the pillow that Beatrice's hand touched was wet. "I can see perfectly well that something is the matter. You've been acting curiously all summer, and there's no point in your getting so thin as you are, and we might as well have this thing out. If you've got yourself into any mess of any kind—about money or anything—" She paused, but Irene did not speak. She had turned a pale profile to her sister, and little gulps moved at intervals down her too-slender throat.

"Really, Irene!" She spoke ironically. "You don't expect me to infer that all this grief is because you're going to lose *me*? I know too well that you're simply delighted about *that*!"

"Well, it is—in a way—of course, connected with that!"

"What *do* you mean?"

"I mean," said Irene, goaded into defiant expression now, "I mean that it makes me perfectly miserable to see the way you treat Clarence, to know what a wretched life he's got before him, when he's tied to a heartless, disagreeable person like you! You don't love him! You couldn't look anybody in the face for a minute, and begin to make them think you loved him!"

"Do you mean—" Beatrice spoke with slow incredulity. The adjectives applied by her sister to herself didn't offend her; she had never tried for Irene's good opinion, and she did not even defend herself now. "Do you really mean that you've been crying up here all afternoon over the future misery of Clarence Winslow?"

"He *ought* to be miserable—I want him to be miserable!"

"Oh!"

Beatrice flung aside the wet pillow, propped a dry one in its place, and leaned thoughtfully back against the bed's head. This was the explanation, then. Irene was in love, really in love with Clarence. It didn't seem possible that anybody could be in love with Clarence, and if Irene had achieved the unlikely feat, still it wasn't the same thing, in essence or in degree, as her own clawing, tormenting love for Dion Mallory. If it were even the least little bit like that—

"But everything's settled, Irene. Why! Presents and invitations and everything. Why on earth couldn't you have said something sooner? Then it might have been possible to— But *now*—"

"There isn't anything to do about it, of course," said the girl sullenly. "I didn't care so much at first. Only the more I see him around the more I—and you're so *mean* to him!" she ended viciously.

Had the whole scene been staged a year earlier, Beatrice would probably have listened quite callously to the exposition of her sister's grief, if she had taken the trouble to draw it out. Now she considered the situation uneasily, Irene's unhappiness taking its place amazingly as a real motive, and a strong one.

Of course, it was perfectly true that she, Beatrice, would very likely lead Clarence a dog's life. If he knew what was good for him, he'd switch to the gentle and impressionable Irene with relieved rapture—a girl who was quite as pretty as Beatrice, a girl who had never been "talked about," and who really loved him for himself alone.

"But it would be an awful thing to do—*now*!" she said aloud. "And if I did break it off, it wouldn't necessarily do you any good—it's not so easy as that, you know!"

Irene stared.

"Do you mean," she asked wonderingly, "that you *would*—just on my account?"

Beatrice frowned into the azure dusk beyond the open window.

"Do you suppose I want you to be as unhappy as I am?" she demanded fiercely, and then to her surprise found that she, too, was fighting tears that seemed to have assailed her without warning.

"Beatrice!" Irene's whisper was awestruck. "Why—you're crying."

Nobody had ever seen Beatrice cry before.

The two girls wept together, the younger rather from habitude and emotional excitement than grief, for hope was beginning to flutter in her heart. She might be young, she might be inexperienced, but she knew well enough that with the singing of the siren Beatrice silenced, she could draw her man to her again as she had all but drawn him before. It was not fair to pit her against a girl eight years older in the arts of beauty and the wiles of flirtation; of course, she hadn't been able to hold Clarence against such odds. But in the absence of competition she felt a justifiable confidence. He would be wanting sympathy, too, and Irene was good at sympathy.

Beatrice got up at last with an impatient shake of her shoulders.

"It will be the third time I've broken an engagement, and I suppose they'll say nicer things about me than ever! But," she promised, "you shall have your chance, anyhow, Irene."

She paused, and added, significantly enough:

"You and Clarence."

CHAPTER XII.

If Irene went to bed that night with a warm, new affection for her oldest sister in her heart, Gladys retired with quite opposite feelings; she had en-

countered Beatrice on the landing outside Irene's room, and dared a bit of juvenile impertinence, and her ears had been soundly boxed in retribution.

Beatrice had not become an angel yet.

She was indeed unsafe to live with in the following days, and the little girls discovered that it was prudent to keep out of her way, since your head was likely to be snapped off for the mildest remark.

There were arrangements of all kinds to be countermanded, miserable, difficult notes to be written, all the presents to be returned, and remonstrances and reproaches from a variety of people to be listened to.

Amos Cowdrey had for once shown real displeasure to his daughter, meeting her with so portentously thunderous a brow that she had decided hastily to be frank with him about her motives.

"Irene really cares, you see," she concluded. "And I—don't, and never did. But I fully meant to go ahead with it, till I found out how the child felt."

"It isn't business," he said, still vaguely troubled. "And I'm afraid you'll suffer socially. But that's your own affair. I guess I've misjudged you a little, Beatrice—I've sometimes thought you didn't have any too much affection for your little sisters. You're a pretty good girl to stand back for Irene this way!"

He presented her with a diamond and platinum necklace, in replacement of the presents of all kinds that had to be returned, which exceeded them considerably in intrinsic value.

With Clarence Beatrice hadn't had an interview at all. With characteristic avoidance of the unpleasant, she had simply written him a note.

DEAR CLARENCE: Brace yourself for a blow. I find I can't marry you after all. I do not love you enough, and you do not love me either—you simply don't know me at all, really. If you knew me better you wouldn't want to marry me. I'm perfectly well aware

that I've behaved abominably to you, and I hope you'll forgive me, some day if not right away. Apologetically,

BEATRICE

P. S.—For Heaven's sake let's not have any embarrassment about this, or recriminations. I admit I'm entirely in the wrong, and I shall always be glad to see you as a friend. I hope you'll keep on coming to see us. The children are all devoted to you. B. C.

The announcement that the marriage was, after all, not to take place, caused a recrudescence of talk about Beatrice Cowdrey, whose past sins were all called up and condemned over again in the fresh interest roused by this latest vagary. Lucia was furious, having found her maid of honor's costume more becoming than anything she had ever worn.

But the person who would have been most interested in the news did not immediately hear of it.

Dion Mallory's night in the rain had resulted naturally enough in a severe cold which passed rapidly into pneumonia. Time stood still for him, after that nocturnal adventure, while he alternated between delirium, periods of conscious pain, and complete exhaustion; and, when he awoke with his faculties about him and asked the date, he turned cold at the answer, for it was one day past the day set for Beatrice Cowdrey's wedding.

What an underhanded trick of fate!

For he would have gone to her, would have implored her to marry him and not Winslow, with such a stormy variety of arguments and pleas that she could not possibly have resisted him. He would have confessed everything to her, he thought; have won her forgiveness; have forced her forgiveness. She could not denounce him more bitterly than he was eager to denounce himself; he had acted throughout like a bounder. But everything detestable in his behavior, he would have pointed out to her, had its unquestionable root in love. He'd been jealous of all the other men who had ever come near her.

Dion would get so far in his imagined scene with her, and then he would remember with a horrible feeling like that of dropping through space in a dream, that it was too late, that she was married to Winslow.

He got up the next day, moved about the rooms upon one floor in dressing gown and slippers. It amazed and enraged him that the downfall of all his dearest hopes should be able apparently to coincide with an undeniable improvement in health. He felt stronger, could even swallow his egg-nog without loathing, and, having swallowed it, felt better than ever.

The day was unseasonable, sultry and thunderous, a day out of August thrust forward into October. People who had been out complained of the heat, but it could invade only agreeably Dion's high-ceilinged stone house, whose walls still held the chill of brisker days preceding this one, of the long rain that had begun with his illness.

In the evening the still murkiness overhead thickened, and the vague, faint rumble of thunder that had sounded at long intervals through the afternoon became louder and nearer, menacing. Dion, sensitive always to atmospheric suggestion, felt the coming of a storm, and welcomed it; it would help to relieve his own surcharged mood.

His nurse brought a tray of food, arranged the books and papers he might want on the table at his side, on which stood also the lamp and a telephone, within easy reaching distance, and departed for the evening.

After the long, slow gathering of its forces, the storm was breaking now with commensurate violence, uttering for Dion all his own tumult and wretchedness, easing his nerves strangely. He switched off the lamp at his elbow, to watch the leaping sword of the lightning in its full splendor, and, after the nurse, whom he did not care to defy,

had gone, he rang for a servant and had the window nearest him opened wide, to damp, chill air and a spray of rebounding raindrops from the sill.

The telephone sounded at his side and he reached for the receiver.

"Hello?"

"I want to ask about Mr. Mallory."

It sounded unbearably like Beatrice's voice. But one does not turn aside on one's wedding journey to make long-distance inquiries about one's best friends, how much less for one's repudiated lovers!

"I've just heard that he's ill. How is he? Can I speak to the nurse?"

"The nurse is out."

Dion couldn't speak collectedly, because the conviction was on him that the voice at the other end of the wire, impossible or not, was Beatrice's. Her next words clinched it unnecessarily.

"This is Miss Cowdrey speaking."

"Oh, *Beatrice!*"

Confound it, Miss Cowdrey—Beatrice would be Mrs. Winslow! She had younger sisters, he knew, and sisters' voices are often alike. He was within an ace of giving a third person's account of himself, and hanging up. But he hesitated, and she said:

"Dion, it is you? I thought it sounded like you, but they said you were so ill, it didn't seem possible. You're better, then?"

"I beg your pardon," he said, recovering himself somewhat. "I am quite all right, thanks—shall be about in a few days. You took me aback by speaking of yourself as Miss Cowdrey. I've been, of course, out of everything. Is the wedding postponed?"

There was a short silence before she answered:

"It's not to take place at all—it's broken off."

Now he knew that he was happily delirious again, or dreaming; things don't happen that way in a cross-grained world. He had the less compunction

in letting all his longing for her warm his voice.

"Beatrice! Do you know what that means to me? Is it——"

The receiver clattered on the table, Dion sat a moment numb and stupidly staring after the involuntary jerk of his body to the shock, and the loudest thunder of all shouted overhead.

It had died into grumblings before he realized what had happened, that the telephone wiring had been struck, and that Beatrice had undoubtedly sustained a similar shock at the other end—if, indeed, she had ever in reality called him up, if the whole occurrence was not a projection of his own overwrought nerves, in some unexplainable way perhaps aided by or acting through the electrical disturbance outside. He had explored a little into the Freudian mysteries and knew that the thing one wishes is the thing one dreams. He hadn't consciously formulated a wish that Beatrice might after all not have married Winslow, because such a wish would have seemed too pitifully futile, too improbable of fulfillment, but his subconscious being was, of course, permeated by no other desire.

She hadn't really telephoned him, he decided——

But he took up the receiver again, nevertheless, in the effort to reestablish the connection that he half believed had never occurred. He could get no response at all. The system was wildly disorganized by the storm, and the wire out of Dion's house was a dead wire.

CHAPTER XIII.

Beatrice, at the extension telephone in her own sitting room at the lakeside cottage, felt the shock cruelly, coming as it did on nerves unstrung in the lassitude of empty days after a critical, irrevocable action, and further tormented by the stealthy approach of the storm through the hot afternoon.

Her father was in town, Irene mortoring with the already half-consolated Clarence, and the children, in spite of the heat, already pursuing their winter régime under Miss Gardiner's superintendence. Beatrice had wandered from spot to spot, looking with apprehension from wan water to sullen sky, wondering what was to be her future; dissatisfied, on edge, wretched. Then the rain had driven her indoors, and she had by sheer chance picked up a paper, turned to its page of social news, and read a brief mention of Mallory's illness.

Pneumonia being one of those illnesses of which people occasionally die, she had forgotten her quarrel with him, the inexpugnable humiliation she had suffered at his hands, and had telephoned hastily to his house for his latest news. It was unexpected and breathtaking enough to find herself speaking directly to Dion, but the conventional question and answer, through the safe medium of a telephone instrument, were easily compassable. Then had come the undefinable, heart-shaking change in Dion's voice. And before she had well thrilled to it, the shock.

Beatrice, too, asked herself as she worked the hook frantically up and down, in the vain attempt to get communication restored, whether she had dreamed that change in his voice, whether the electric shock had disordered her memory. Had he really said: "Do you know what that means to me?"

She stopped her efforts to get central and turned away from the telephone, as the obvious interpretation he might put upon her act came to her. She had engaged herself to Winslow in rebuke to Dion, and by way of punishing him; he would think now, of course, that she had broken the engagement because she was not strong enough to carry out a revenge upon him, because she was weakly ready to be loved by

him on any terms, rather than make the excellent and conventional match arranged with Clarence Winslow.

He would think she had called him up to-night to serve notice on him that she was at his disposal.

The thing was so far from true that it had literally not occurred to Beatrice throughout the whole business of breaking with Clarence, through the days that had elapsed since she had broken with him, that such a supposition was possible. It stared starkly at her now, the only construction Mallory could well put on her behavior.

And from her first passionate indignation against a Dion imagined as thinking this, she found herself slipping into a dream of the happiness that might be hers if she did, indeed, meet him on this ground, if—as she did not mean to do—she allowed him to love her, while remaining Beatrice Cowdrey.

There would be excursions in the *Wanderer* to remote points on the lake, there would be long motor drives together, and she'd make him take her often, too, in the De Haviland plane that he continued to fly for sport. If society neglected her a little, even if people suspected the connection between them, they would be none the less happy in their hours together.

She remembered again the warm excitement of his voice, crying, "Do you know what that means to me?" a second before the bolt struck, and she recalled over and over the little ghost of the sound which lingered unforgetably in her inner ear, for the pleasure of the thrill it could give her.

She wanted unbearably to go on speaking to him, to challenge him: "Well, yes—tell me exactly what it does mean!" to listen again to his love making, to question him directly, as she had never questioned him, on his reason for not asking her to marry him.

For if, indeed, there were some inextricable entanglement, how ready she

would be to waive ceremony and position, to give him, as he had begged, whatever could be given, to wait as long as fate might decide, for the offering and claiming of the rest! It was no cowardice, no self-interest, that had made her deny him, only her pride, as between him and her.

She was suddenly transfixed, as she considered these matters and thought with less resentment of him, by a thought of fear which had not before visited her, of possible injury to Dion at the same time that she had received the shock from the telephone. What if he had been seriously hurt, himself perhaps struck, and the shock to her transmitted along the wire? The storm, now almost over, had been of the destructive kind occurring by no means yearly even in that part of the world, and the newspapers, beyond doubt, would record many deaths in consequence of it in the morning. She felt cold, as the strong probability of catastrophe struck her.

There was no help to be wrenched from the telephone, which remained infuriatingly unresponsive, and Beatrice, after the hasty consideration of several expedients for setting her mind at rest, decided recklessly upon the wildest of them, made up her mind to motor into town herself, late as it was, and inquire directly at Dion's door.

Excitement rose in her as she approached this resolve. Without as yet giving recognition to it, she knew that there was forming in her at the same time another purpose—that she would not go to Mallory's house to-night to ask a question or two on the doorstep only; that once there she must go in; that anxiety for his safety was only half her motive, and the stronger half was the need to finish the conversation, in which the telephone now refused to be the medium.

She sent a hasty message to the garage, ordering William to bring around

the small closed car she habitually drove when shopping, and pinned a glowing little red hat over her dark hair, slipped into a light motoring coat and gauntlets.

William she dismissed after his task of bringing the car to the steps. The roads between the city and the lake playground of its plutocrats were, fortunately, too good to be seriously damaged even by such rain as that which had just fallen, the final showers of which were still descending when Beatrice set out. Her chain-covered wheels rolled through standing water often, but always over a hard bed, and she turned into the boulevard along the southern end of the lake without mishap.

Driving at night exhilarated her always, and now the storm, the sense of movement, and crisis again in her affairs, after the check they had suffered, the insensible recognition of the truth that she was going to Dion, not merely going to ascertain that he was unhurt—something, after all, assured her that he *was* unhurt—brought her a mood that was not short of exultant.

She reached the city, drove a little—but not much; she was Beatrice Cowdrew—more slowly, turned into the street where Dion lived, saw that the tall, gray house loomed uninjured, that there was no sign of catastrophe there, no hurrying lights or waiting cars or doctors.

She drew up before his door, ran up the steps, and rang.

"I want to see Mr. Mallory!" she said peremptorily to the man who opened to her.

"Mr. Mallory is not recovered yet, madam."

But he spoke hesitatingly. Beatrice's mien was imperious even though her breath was short.

"If I might take a message——"

She hadn't thought of a card, but seeing some of other people's, left with inquiries for Dion's progress, in a re-

ceptable on the hall table, she possessed herself of one and, having drawn a line through the name of its first owner, wrote on the back:

I had to know if you were struck by lightning. You can come down, can't you?
B. C.

Dion descended with as little delay as the necessity of dressing permitted. He came in looking very pale and large-eyed, his hair longer than he usually allowed it to grow, his clothes fitting him less perfectly than before his illness.

"Beatrice!"

He reached her side, forgetting to feel giddy after the unwonted exertion.

"Then it really happened? It was really you—it must have been—on the telephone!"

"I had to finish talking!" she contradicted the message of her card. "Go on—do you remember what you were going to say next?"

"It is wonderfully generous of you to give me the chance to go on. There's nothing in the world I wanted so much. It seemed impossible. I wasn't at all sure I hadn't dreamed the first part—but I was writing to you when they told me you were here. This is still more like a dream. But it is you, isn't it? The lightning didn't hurt you? May I touch you, to make sure it's really you?"

She gave him her left hand, stripping off the glove first, and he held it, seemed to forget to let it go. It bore, now, no offending ring of Clarence Winslow's. Irene would be wearing that, in a few days more. Beatrice made no move to reclaim her fingers.

The exaltation of the drive had left her; she was almost solemn now as she felt the warmth of his hand moving softly upon hers, as she met his eyes, that surely had a new expression as they looked at her. They had doted, before, with a little light in each to mock the doting—now they worshipped. Per-

haps it was a mere added respectfulness, assumed in decent recognition of her being, with some impropriety, possibly, in his house, and hence entitled to double deference. But in that case he ought not to go on holding her hand.

"You asked me a question," she said with a desperate seriousness new in her. "A sort of rhetorical question—as if you expected me to know the answer. Do you remember?"

"I don't remember anything," he said foolishly. "Do we have to go back to that? Can't we originate our remarks as we go along? I have a million things to say to you!"

"But it's for an answer to this one thing," she exclaimed, "that I came! You said, did I know what it meant to you—my not having married Clarence. Well, Dion"—she took her hand away from his that clung and protested vainly—"what, exactly, does it mean?"

"It means everything in this world and the next!" he said ardently. "I want to spend the rest of my life showing you what it means—and you expect me to compress it into a sentence or two right now! Listen, Beatrice—I don't dare say what I want to say, without a preamble. I have to go a long way back; I have to *explain* a lot of things—God knows I can't *excuse* them! I have just, you see, to be frank, and to throw myself upon your mercy!"

She nodded, thinking that she understood, sure now that her surmise of a marriage abroad was the explanation.

"I couldn't imagine why you behaved as you did—why you never asked me to marry you. It made me angry. You should have explained sooner!"

"But I haven't explained at all yet!" he protested in bewilderment.

"You needn't explain—I guess! You couldn't propose to me, because you were already married—and she wouldn't release you!" And then, as Dion stared at her, too surprised to speak, to deny the glibly uttered charge, she hurried

on. "If you'd only *explained* that! Of course, I'd have done whatever you liked—you know you've made me love you idiotically. I'm yours, Dion!—yours on any terms at all. That's what I came in to tell you—really!"

He had meant laboriously to explain, painfully to humble himself, to the girl whose innocent independence he had so basely misjudged. He might have had a fresh qualm of questioning about her, in view of to-night's procedures. But no poles are wider set than a man's judgment of such a step as Beatrice's, when the lover in question is, and when he is not, himself. Dion's sense of his own unworthiness was doubled as her meaning came home to him, and his opinion of the girl correspondingly exalted. Her rashness was noble, touching, adorable. But how very badly she needed a husband to take care of her!

"Beatrice!" he said, holding her close, kissing her hair, which had a heady fragrance and a soft resilience under his lips. "Beatrice, you're all wrong. You're 'way off. I'm no more married than Winslow is. I didn't ask you to marry me before, because I was an ass, and scoundrel enough to believe some stories and some false appearances about you. I'm going to spend the rest of my life, after we're married, trying to make up to you for that.

"But, dear heart, part of that was your own fault. You do behave terribly—you must have been atrociously brought up. Coming here to-night, for instance—well, I won't quarrel with that! Only you must go home in about one more minute. Kiss me just once!"

She turned up a face beautiful in utter beatitude.

He kissed it, several times more than once.

"And when we're married," he said with the overbearing assurance she adored, "I shall see that you behave yourself!"



Goliath Gamble and Fate

By James Francis Dwyer

Author of "The Greatest Dream," etc.

THERE is something weird and thrilling in Lloyd's epitaph, "Lost at sea; no clew," written after the names of ships that disappear mysteriously in the big waters. We make futile guesses as to their fate. We think of them committing hara-kari on some submerged rock, or, enraged with the god of commerce to whom they are in thrall, suddenly jolting out scores of rusted rivets whose condition they cunningly hid from the marine surveyors. It is so easy to guess.

In a Lloyd's publication of some eight years back there is the name of a steamer which sailed from San Francisco bound for Melbourne, Australia, and, after her name, appears that grim and imagination-stirring entry: "Lost at sea; no clew." It was a good strong steamer, too; disgusting to Lloyd's. They had rated her highly, and, during the month following her departure from the Golden Gate, old worm-eaten tubs had sailed up and down the Pacific without encountering the slightest disturbance. This story is the record of the vessel's last days, and it proves how difficult it is to make a correct guess regarding the mysterious disappearance of a vessel on the great wastes.

The real name of the steamer, for certain reasons, must be withheld. For purposes of reference we will call her the *Wapunga*. The captain, like the

ship, must also appear in this narrative under an alias. We will call him Captain Goliath Gamble.

A queer fellow was Goliath Gamble. From the moment he could handle the weapons of trickery, he was a guerrilla fighter against virtue. A cowardly fighter! Never out in the open in the purple uniform of Vice! Not Goliath! Always in the brush, his gun hidden before his victim had collapsed! Now and again he made a haul, the most cowardly crook makes a killing once in a while, but, generally, Goliath Gamble sucked at the bones of sin because he lacked the courage to grab the red meat.

A wanderer was Goliath. The wanderer need not be a scoundrel, but, infallibly, the scoundrel must be a wanderer. Out in the badly policed spots of the fringe, in those places where Vice has flung down calthrops for the pursuing feet of Justice, Rumor, with her thousand tongues, whispered about Goliath Gamble. He was "Big Gal" to sharp-eyed criminals at the Hsia-kwan at Nanking, the Tanjong Pagar at Singapore, the Bund at Yokohama, Circular Quay, Sydney, and at a score of other water fronts.

"Where tides hatch vice
Because the sea is wide
And smuggling luggers, squat and foul,
The law deride!"

Captain Goliath Gamble had obtained

the captaincy of the *Wapunga* by blackmail. He knew, or professed to know of gangrenous spots in the life record of a director of the Three Oceans Trading Company that owned the *Wapunga*, and the director did not have sufficient confidence in the healthiness of his past to ask for a show-down. Despite the advance of the film industry there are more people making a living out of the art of blackmail than out of the movies. The terrified director asked the manager to appoint Gamble to the *Wapunga*, and Goliath got the berth two days before the vessel sailed.

The *Wapunga* left San Francisco on a misty Thursday and passed through the Golden Gate as a thick fog came rolling inland. She dived into the fog bank as if desirous of hiding herself from the scattered waters along the beach, and she was never seen again.

The *Wapunga* carried thirty-seven passengers; thirteen in the first saloon, and twenty-four in the second. They were a mixed lot. "There are, on all ships," remarked a cynic, "two classes of passengers; those one should avoid and those one should avoid most carefully." The *Wapunga* had but four exceptions to this bitter summing up.

Three of the saloon passengers were decent folk, one of the second-class travelers deserves mention. There may have been others, but their virtues were not perceptible, and, furthermore, they have no part in this narrative.

Number one of the saloon passengers was a young sheep king from the Riverina district of New South Wales. He was a tall, well-built man of twenty-seven, with a frank, honest face. He disliked Captain Goliath Gamble from the moment he saw him.

Number two was a young woman of twenty-four, traveling alone to Hobart, Tasmania. At least she wasn't altogether alone. With her was a magnificent Persian cat, with peculiar flame-colored fur and extraordinary eyes.

The girl had a sweet, beautiful face to which had come the soft charm that often appears as a recompense for suffering. A high-born young person, without a doubt. She walked the deck as if her little feet were clamping colts that disdained the planks of the *Wapunga*. She had wonderful hands that peeped out of the long, mediævallike sleeves of her black gowns like fairy things that lived a separate existence, cut off by the long sleeves from the life of the body. Her name upon the passenger list was Marjorie Hartley.

The third saloon passenger was a black-bearded doctor from Ballarat, Victoria, who was also a justice of the peace, a very nervous man, named Yates.

There is doubt about the identity of the fourth passenger, but her name is of little moment. She was a middle-aged woman who knitted continuously. She loved Ki-San, the flame-colored cat belonging to Miss Hartley.

On the evening of the ninth day out from San Francisco, fate started an offensive movement against Captain Goliath Gamble, a strange, queerly-planned attack, a sinister movement that took Goliath unawares.

At eight bells the captain was in his cabin. Always after dinner, at which he invariably gorged himself, he retired to his own quarters to smoke one of the huge, black cigars he carried for his own particular pleasure. It was his hour of sensuous relaxation. He would lay his great body upon the couch, and, moon face upturned, he would assume the part of a human volcano of blowing blasts of smoke ceilingward. The greater the smoke density, the greater the pleasure he derived.

On this particular evening the captain had created an atmosphere that delighted him. He gurgled his appreciation of his own efforts. He rolled his great head to contemplate the effect on the outlying parts of the cabin, but as

his eyes took in the faint outlines of the big armchair beside the table, he gave an ugly grunt that expressed surprise and temper, and he quickly clawed himself into a sitting position. A visitor had slipped into the cabin under cover of the smoke clouds and was calmly contemplating the captain from the crotton-covered depths of the big armchair!

Captain Goliath Gamble stared at the intruder. The man's face was hidden by a large black muffler which left only his eyes visible. He wore an overcoat and thick gloves. A broad-brimmed felt hat was drawn down till its rim formed a liaison with the muffler except at the point where the quiet eyes looked out at Captain Goliath Gamble.

Gamble's lips were on the slot-machine principle. They automatically dropped a string of curses whenever an annoyance was thrust into his stupid brain. They acted efficiently on this occasion. Chromatic curses, coined on hell ships and water fronts, rushed into the smoke-filled cabin.

The visitor made a silent objection. He pushed forward a gloved hand which gripped an automatic whose barrel was of the indecently stunted variety, and Gamble became silent. The compressed wickedness suggested by the contracted barrel halted the blasphemous onrush.

In the little silence which followed, a rime of fear gathered upon the face of Goliath. A many-fingered past distended his sweat pores. A conscience, nettle-wrapped and vicious, fell upon his courage.

Goliath was unable to catch the first, soft-spoken words of his visitor. His auditory clutch did not work till the sentence was nearly finished.

"From Singapore to the port of Canton," the visitor said softly. "The ship was the *Cloud of Gold* and you were the captain."

He paused, and silence, like a ghost

rabbit, crept into the cabin. The irritating, file-keeping section of Goliath's brain, stirred by the words "Singapore to Canton" advised the captain to be cautious. "Watch this fellow," whispered the file-keeping cells. "He's out for information. He's going to question you about that mur——"

Goliath Gamble, with a great effort, choked back the too-ready information dispenser within his own brain, but the visitor seemed to understand from Gamble's eyes that his words had touched the fuse of memory.

"I see that you already guess what I am going to talk about," he said softly. "That helps a little."

Again came silence, a silence that irritated the captain. He wished the visitor would scream at him.

"Some one," continued the visitor, "robbed and murdered a passenger who carried a large amount of money and precious stones. You and the first mate fixed the blame upon a young man who was working his way to Canton. He was innocent. You and the mate knew he was innocent."

Conscience, with a pelt like a porcupine, rolled upon Gamble's hastily constructed defense. It came out in broken order, the words unlinked. "A—a piece of a—of a coat button was found in the cabin—in the cabin of the mur—murdered man," he stammered. "The other part of—of the button was on the coat of the fellow we accused."

The home of terror in the head of Goliath caught at the words "fellow we accused." "Why, you fool," screamed the terror imps, "this is the fellow you accused! This gink on the chair! It's him for certain! Try to get at your gun! Quick!"

The fear imps flung Goliath's gaze toward the drawer of the table in which his gun was hidden, they even forced a muscular movement of the legs, but the snub-nosed automatic was alert.

"I wouldn't move if I were you,"

came the silky admonition, "these little guns are jumpy things."

Goliath slopped back on the couch and the silence ate the little substance out of his stuttering remark about the broken coat button. Goliath wondered why he had made such a silly remark.

The visitor resumed. "There is no need to tell you what happened between the murder and the arrival of the *Cloud of Gold* at Canton, but what took place after you handed the young man over to the Chinese authorities on the *Cheung-tei* might interest you. He was an American, you'll remember, but for reasons, splendid reasons, he could not ask the help of the American consul. As a matter of fact he was a—a suitor for the hand of the consul's only daughter. An unwelcome suitor as far as the girl's father was concerned.

"If he had asked the help of the consul, he would have been released immediately. But he would not ask. He was young and—and curiously gallant."

There was a pause, and Goliath Gamble's ears tossed the concluding words among the imps of fear and hate which listened to the narrative. "Curiously gallant!" they cried. "What does that mean? Curiously gallant? Ho, ho!"

"He had traveled on the *Cloud of Gold* under an alias," continued the soft voice. "He—he had been forbidden to visit Canton. It was unlucky that he was in that position when accused of a crime. He thought if he told his real name and his nationality, it would compromise the girl. You see he came to Canton at her suggestion."

Captain Goliath Gamble found the silence so intense, when the visitor paused, that he believed the *Wapunga* had stopped. His ears were so intent on the soft-voiced utterances of the unknown, that they refused, in the little pauses, to register the far-off thumping of the engines. Goliath thought the night curiously quiet, a night filled with

a strange expectancy that was a little terrifying.

"The Chinese authorities dealt with him in their own way." The soft voice took up the narrative again. "You see they thought him an outcast white and they were delighted with his refusal to confess. *They were wretches!*"

The voice grew shrill and startled the fear imps in Goliath's brain. "It's him!" they whined. "It's surely him! Get your gun, you fool! When he finishes he'll shoot you!"

But Captain Goliath Gamble couldn't move. The snub-nosed revolver and the soft, dreadfully soft, voice brought about a semihypnotic condition which made action impossible. The visitor continued:

"They dealt with him in their own way. You'll understand probably. He was young and rebellious, and they thought—they thought refined torture would bring him to his senses. There was a jailer in the Sai-kwan district in Canton who had a reputation as a torturer.

"They strapped this innocent young American in a chair and—and for thirty-six hours there fell upon his head a never-ending rain of rice! The Sai-kwan jailer had invented the machine. It dropped twenty grains of rice a minute, one by one, and—and it wasn't the rice that hurt, it was the little waits between the grains. *The little waits between the grains!*"

Gamble's legs twitched nervously. The snub-nosed revolver lifted the fraction of an inch, then dropped again.

"It was a devilish thing. But he did not tell anything. He said he did not murder the man on the *Cloud of Gold*, that he didn't know who murdered him, but he would not tell anything about himself, would not tell why he was visiting Canton or the name of a single friend in the Shameen! And in the Shameen was the American consul!

You see he—he loved the girl. He loved the girl."

Goliath Gamble's brain was infected by the repetition. The four words jizzed within his bulging head. "He loved the girl!" They danced up and down upon the gray matter the captain carried, danced with spiked shoes so that they hurt. *He loved the girl!* He groaned with the agony they produced. A small portion of his brain that tried to retain control called upon him to do something, anything that would stop the crazy rigadood, and he pulled himself together.

"Well," he stammered, "what do you—what do you come to me for?"

"I haven't finished," said the visitor softly. "They flogged him, flogged him because he knocked down a brute who spat on him, and then, he had been in prison six months when this happened—he escaped. He could not face the father of the girl because—because the flogging brought the matter under the notice of the consul, and the consul discovered, after the prisoner's escape, who he really was. The prison authorities showed the consul a wretched snapshot taken on board the *Cloud of Gold* on the morning you accused him of the murder."

"Well?" Goliath flung the interrogative into the cabin of silence.

The snub-nosed revolver appeared to understand the query. It lifted its nose and pointed directly at Gamble's left breast.

"I want you," said the visitor, "to write a full statement exonerating the man you accused. A sworn statement which Doctor Yates, who is a justice of the peace, can witness. You know who did the murder, and you know—you know that the broken button was only a scheme to brand him as the criminal so that some one else might escape. I want you to write this confession."

"And—and if I refuse?" queried Goliath.

There was a slight interval before the answer came to Goliath.

"If you won't, we'll find means to force you. He received in jail a certain number of lashes. You'll get a little reminder of each lash he received, and if you have not written the statement when you get the reminder of the last lash, something will happen, something very unpleasant. It might seem ridiculous to you, because you are captain of the ship, but if—a statement is not made by you there's a big possibility of the first officer taking the *Wapunga* into Melbourne. Now stand up!"

Captain Goliath Gamble heaved his huge carcass from the couch and stood erect.

"Right-about turn!" ordered the visitor.

Captain Gamble made a clumsy right-about movement.

"Now remain like that for five minutes," ordered the soft voice. "Don't move! Keep looking at the wall. I am going to sit here for a few moments."

Captain Goliath Gamble remained, face to the cabin wall, for the full five minutes. He turned cautiously and found the cabin empty, the door to the passageway closed.

The first impulse to rush along the passage and question the officer on the bridge—the captain's cabin was off a passage running back from the bridge and chart room—was throttled by a horrifying vision of the ridicule which his story would provoke. And, of course, the officer had not seen the intruder. The visitor, in the semidarkness, had dodged successfully by the man at the wheel and the officer on duty.

Captain Gamble dropped into the chair vacated by the unknown, and, squatting boneless and inert, tried to think. Who was the person who had dared to invade his quarters? One of

the crew? No! A passenger? Surely! Which passenger? That was the question!

With his big head resting in the cups of his enormous palms, he tried to recall the face of the young man who had been accused of the murder on the *Cloud of Gold*. He failed completely in this task. He remembered that he, Gamble, had not been too anxious to look into the flashing eyes of the accused.

"A bad-tempered brute!" he growled. "I wonder he didn't kill a score of those Chinks when they were giving him that little shower bath of rice."

He decided it was a passenger who had invaded the cabin. Not the young man of the *Cloud of Gold*, but some one else acting in his interests.

"By the body of Bel, I'll find who it is, and jab them in irons for the rest of the trip!" he growled. "They won't fool Goliath Gamble!"

He took from a drawer a list of the passengers and studied the names carefully. He pushed a thickly padded forefinger down the column and built up a mental picture of the owner of each name.

He knew all the first-class passengers by sight. The forefinger, as elastic as a camel's pad, left an imprint of a huge whorl beneath each name as it climbed slowly down the list. Goliath, head thrust forward, made guttural comments.

"Palliser? No. He's a fool. On his first trip."

The fat forefinger smeared a trail to the next name.

"Louis V. Orton?" Gamble visualized Orton, a buyer for a large dry-goods firm in Collins Street, Melbourne. "Prissified ass!" he growled.

"Doctor L. Yates." The visitor had mentioned the doctor. "Justice of the peace, eh?" The padded forefinger spread itself as if it sensed dangerous ground. Welts of worry appeared

above Goliath's piggy eyes. He was to swear the statement before the doctor!

He thought for a moment of sending for the medico and demanding what he knew of the matter, but he decided against this action. If the doctor was in anyway cognizant of the visit, the unknown would not have mentioned his name.

The fat forefinger moved on.

He came to the second-class passengers, and spent a full hour in staring at their names. Beads of perspiration slipped carelessly down the ladder of chins and plunged on to the list, thereby giving the fat forefinger moisture for the Bertillon imprints it was manufacturing.

The examination of the names of the crew followed. Beneath each name the forefinger left its whorl of sweat and dirt, a very heavy one beneath the name of the chief officer, Mr. Palmer. Captain Gamble did not like Mr. Palmer.

Captain Goliath Gamble put the lists away and sat staring at a battered topee, a relic of his China days, which hung from a nail. He sat without moving for about twenty minutes; then he did a curious thing. Possibly it was the sight of the topee and thoughts of the *Cloud of Gold* that made him do it. It was while he was in the China trade that he first witnessed the trick he attempted.

Captain Gamble stood up, waddled across the room, and started to rummage in the mixed-up contents of an old trunk. He found a Bible, coverless, and a little tattered, and he returned to the table.

He placed the book upon the table, stood off from it a pace, then chanted slowly the following bit of doggerel:

"Jesus, if You know all things
You know what I would know,
So guide my finger so I'll see
The path I ought to go."

Captain Gamble, after repeating the verse, shut his eyes and put forth his big hand. He touched the Bible, opened

it, and, still with closed eyes, placed a finger solidly in the center of a page. Then he opened his eyes, stepped forward, and read the verse at which the finger pointed. He had opened at the Book of Job 10:14 and he read:

"If I sin, then Thou markest me, and Thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity."

Goliath hurled the Bible across the cabin. He flung himself undressed upon the couch and switched off the light. It was a queer night. He listened intently. The engines of the *Wapunga* were struggling with a great silence that crept in from the Pacific wastes.

Captain Goliath Gamble spent a sleepless night. Behind the big question as to the identity of his visitor, there crept another. "How many lashes did the innocent young American receive from the prison authorities at Canton?"

The second question was boosted a little, immediately after breakfast on the morning following the visit of the unknown. Captain Goliath Gamble, standing outside the saloon, was approached by a steward carrying an envelope upon a little tray. He presented the tray to the captain, and Gamble's fat fingers brought the envelope close to the piggy eyes. The superscription read: "Please take to captain. Urgent."

Goliath ripped the envelope open, and, as he tilted it in search of contents, *the half of a bone button dropped into the palm of his big hand!*

His yell of rage startled the steward, who had turned back to the saloon.

"Come here!" screamed the captain. "Where did you get this?"

"Some one left it on a table in the saloon, sir. I found it and showed it to the purser, sir. He told me to take it to you."

"Who sits at that table?" roared Gamble.

"No one, sir. It's one of the unoc-

cupied tables. No one even sits near it. It's over on the port side, an' we just use it to put clothes on it. Clothes that we don't want."

Goliath, red-faced and angry, glared at the frightened steward, then with a snort of rage he stamped out on the deck and tossed the half button out into the sea. Gripping the rail he endeavored to regain control of himself. Some one might be watching the effect made upon him by the presentation. He must act wisely.

He walked along the deck, lifting his fat hand whenever an occupant of the deck chairs saluted him.

"Good morning, captain," piped an old lady whose face, like that of an intellectual crow, peeped out of a pile of rugs.

"Mornin', madam. Mornin'," said the captain.

The little Melbourne buyer, Orton, passed with a pompous salute. "Fine morning, skipper. Driving her along, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir," growled the captain.

Goliath hated the passengers, hated all of them. In that little jungle of humanity made up of the thirty-seven passengers was a danger, a terrible danger which threatened him. Perhaps the mysterious visitor was on the deck watching him. He breathed soft curses as he tramped up and down. Of course he should have sprung upon the visitor, throttled him and thrust him into irons. His power as a captain was enormous.

But memory taunted him as he told himself what he should have done. "That stunted revolver was not a nice thing," whispered memory. "They make those things too short nowadays. That thing has a stomach like a pelican, and it can throw bullets so fast that they often travel touching each other like caterpillars in the springtime."

Captain Goliath Gamble squirmed at the taunts.

He lunched alone. His appetite was a little under normal. He tried to thrust away from him all thoughts of the mysterious visitor of the previous evening, but it was a difficult task. He could not make a statement, and the secret danger which threatened him if he refused grew with each minute that passed.

Thoughts of the doctor came into his mind and he decided to interview him. A steward was sent to invite the little medico to the captain's cabin.

Goliath Gamble was cautious. In a roundabout manner he informed the doctor that he had received a mysterious threat from some unknown person and the doctor's name had been mentioned.

The little medico laughed and Goliath was annoyed. He did not think it the right moment for levity.

"Do you know any one whose conduct or talk makes you suspicious?" cried Goliath.

"I don't," said the doctor sharply.

"You don't suspect any one of dangerous intentions?"

"No, no," snapped the doctor, rising from his chair. "But, talking of danger," he continued, "I wouldn't, if I were you, eat that thing you've just scooped up on your pudding spoon."

Goliath glanced at the spoon with which he had been blindly groping while he talked, then with a yell of rage he sprang to his feet.

"Why—why did you point that out?" he roared. "How did you know it was there?"

"I happened to look at your plate and I saw you take it up on your spoon," said the surprised doctor. "It would do you no good to eat a piece of a coat button, would it?"

Goliath Gamble, red eyes aflame with hate, glared at the doctor. For a moment they stood in silence, then the captain waved a hand toward the door. "Leave my cabin!" he shouted.

"Willingly," said the doctor. "I

didn't wish to come here. You sent for me. I've been grossly insulted."

Goliath Gamble sent for the steward, but the steward knew nothing.

"Did you speak to any one when you were carrying the pudding to me?" roared the captain.

"Yes, sir."

"Who?"

"The chief officer, sir. He stopped me to ask if you were in your cabin."

Goliath swore softly; the frightened steward crept away.

The captain considered the chief officer. He dissected him with the scalpels of suspicion, keen-edged scalpels. The chief was a lean ascetic and Goliath remembered that the manager of the Three Oceans Trading Company had informed him that Palmer had a claim for the berth which he, Goliath, got.

He sat for an hour brooding over the chief. If he, Gamble, was fool enough to make any statement concerning the happening on the *Cloud of Gold*, the chances were that he would be arrested in Melbourne, and the first officer would bring the *Wapunga* back to San Francisco.

"I'll watch that hound!" growled Goliath. "He's a psalm-singing cuss that would drive a knife into you if you weren't looking."

He determined to take another stroll along the promenade deck. It would be ridiculous to show nerves. He must act as if the visit of the unknown to the cabin was of no consequence. But he would watch. From under his thick-folded lids he would make observations and perhaps he would find a clew.

He passed half a dozen sleepy passengers and found Miss Marjorie Hartley reading. Goliath paused. Dainty, patent-leather shoes and shapely silk-sheathed ankles attracted him. The girl did not appear to court company but Goliath was seeking recreation.

"Something good?" he inquired clumsily, nodding at her book.

"Oh, no," she answered. "It's rather dull."

Goliath Gamble dropped his huge frame into a deck chair, alarming Ki-San, the flame-colored cat, who was asleep on Miss Hartley's lap.

"I hate cats," he observed, as the animal, disturbed by his movements, took cover beneath the chair of her mistress.

"Why?" asked the girl.

"They're weird brutes," said Goliath. "They see things."

"Really?" murmured Miss Hartley.

Goliath looked at the girl. He thought there was something sneering in her voice, something that annoyed him. He had noticed it before when he attempted to converse with her.

Goliath dragged his chair closer. He was captain of the ship and it was ridiculous to think that a young girl, without escort, should flout his advances. And, more so, at the moment when he sought recreation which would sweep the fear from his mind.

There was an indecent leer upon his fat face as he spoke. "It's curious, you traveling such a distance alone," he gurgled. "Awfully curious. Now most young ladies that are not traveling with friends are put in charge of the captain."

Miss Hartley's eyes surveyed the fat face with marked disapproval. She opened the book and began to read.

"Now, now, don't get huffy," said Goliath. "I'm a good hand at looking after young ladies."

"I wish you would go away," said the girl. "I do not wish to speak to you."

"But I wish to speak to you," cried Goliath. "I want to ask you——"

Goliath stopped suddenly, the words thrust back by a little gurgle of fear. Ki-San, the flame-colored cat, had found a play toy and she was tapping it gently along the deck. The object struck the captain's shoe while he was speaking and he looked down. The gur-

gle of surprise made Ki-San spring for the shelter of the chair occupied by her mistress.

It was lucky for Ki-San. Captain Goliath Gamble had aimed a kick at the cat, and the toe of his big boot missed her by a narrow margin. With a muttered curse the captain, red-faced and angry, jumped from the chair and stamped off up the deck!

The sheep king, passing Miss Hartley's chair, paused and looked from the girl to the retreating captain and then back to the girl.

"What is up with the old man?" he asked. "I saw him kick at Ki-San."

"The cat was playing with something and he got annoyed," answered the girl. "See, there it is."

The sheep king stooped and picked up the object at which she pointed. "He's easily annoyed," he commented. "This is a bit of a coat button. What's wrong with him?"

A black bottle played an important part in the entertainment sought by Captain Goliath Gamble on the evening following the deck scene. A black bottle and a brother black bottle which took the place of the first when it rolled empty to the floor.

The second bottle and Goliath became great friends. He spoke to it, asked it questions, whispered secrets to it. He called it "ole feller."

"D'ye think it's that hound, Palmer?" he asked. "You're not sure, eh? Well, we'll find out. You an' me'll find out 'fore we're much older."

Later in the night he spoke to the bottle about the use of the lash. He asked questions about the use of the knotted whip in Chinese penal establishments. "How many lashes do you think they'd give a feller?" he asked. "A feller that was insubordinate? Watcher think? Twenty? No? Ten? You do? You think that's about the

number. Ten, eh? Well you're a pretty wise ole bottle."

On the fat, stubby fingers he started to count up the number of broken buttons he had received. "One after breakfast," he muttered, "one at lunch and the one that cursed cat was playing with. That's three. Gotta get seven more, haven't I, ole feller? Seven more. An' then what'll he do? Shoot me, eh? Wotcher think?"

He swept his hand across the tablecloth and some small object fell upon the floor. He found it with difficulty. It was the half button which the doctor had discovered upon the pudding plate, but Goliath's muddled brain made him think it a new arrival.

He rose to his feet and hurled it against the wall of the cabin. The little piece of bone bounced back and landed on the middle of the tablecloth! Goliath, a little terrified, moved away from it. Clutching the black bottle, he staggered to the couch and fell upon it. He lay there drinking and swearing till dawn.

The second black bottle was replaced by a third. The captain remained in his cabin. The boy who brought his morning coffee moved the broken button to the washstand without the captain's knowledge and, later, the drunken, half-crazed Goliath found it and thought it a fifth reminder. He was crushing it into powder beneath his heel, when a knock came to the cabin door and Mr. Palmer entered.

The chief officer stared at Goliath, and Goliath found the stare annoying.

"What are you lookin' at?" he roared.

"What d'ye want?"

"Nothing, sir. I thought you might be ill."

Goliath Gamble staggered across the cabin and thrust his big, red face close to the lean face of Mr. Palmer. "You thought I might be ill, did you?" he roared. "Why don't you tell the truth?

You hoped I would be ill! Isn't that it? You want my ship, don't you?"

"No, sir," answered the chief.

Goliath scowled. "Look out, old Bone Button!" he growled. "Look out, or I'll catch you!"

The chief backed away cautiously, Goliath following. The chief reached the door and, halting for a moment, asked a question. "Any orders, sir?"

"Listen to me," growled the captain.

"I think you're a lean-faced, psalm-singing sniffer, an' before I'd let you get this ship I'd pile her up! D'ye hear me? I'd pile her up."

"Yes, sir," said the chief, and then he discreetly withdrew, closing the cabin door.

Goliath Gamble returned to the black bottle. He muttered to himself as he drank. He told the bottle that the girl, Marjorie Hartley, was an impudent young person. He voiced a wish that he might have her in some quiet place where he could teach her that he was a captain. "A captain, an' a mighty bright captain at that," he chuckled. "She—she doesn't know me, ole feller, does she?" He patted the bottle and drank without the aid of the glass.

The *Wapunga* thundered on her way. The Three Oceans Trading Company knew nothing. Lloyd's knew nothing.

During the afternoon of that day the crazed brain of Captain Goliath Gamble recalled the threat he had made to the chief officer. The brain seized upon the words, "Pile her up." Fine words, thought the brain. Words that showed the character of the captain. The black bottle approved of them. The bottle pointed out to Goliath that the engines of the *Wapunga* were whispering them.

Goliath listened. Sure enough, they were. "Pile her up! Pile her up! Pile her up!" Their advice was quite clear and distinct.

The hours slipped by and Goliath drank deeper. The *Wapunga* was rolling slightly, and the three empty bottles

upon the floor of the cabin snuggled up to each other and clinked musically as the vessel rolled. They added further advice to that tendered by the throbbing engines. "Take the girl!" clinked the bottles. "Take the girl! Take the girl!" Then, as Goliath listened, the three bottles, by nudging each other, clinked out a new line. "Isles of green," they whispered. "Isles of green. Isles of green. Take the girl. Isles of green." Then the far-off engines cut in with their never ending "Pile her up. Pile her up. Pile her up."

All through the late afternoon the chant thundered through the brain of Captain Goliath Gamble. Night came down upon the Pacific. A worried first officer fought off sleep so that he could watch over the safety of the ship and her passengers.

The chant grew more insistent. The throbbing engines and the clinking bottles called upon Goliath Gamble to obey their orders.

"Take the girl! Isles of green! Pile her up!"

They were commands that Goliath could not but obey. He tried to shut his ears to them, but the imperative words seemed to seep in through every pore of his body.

It was midnight when Goliath crept along the passage to the chart room. His red eyes noted the position of the *Wapunga*. "Isles of green!" He was certain that the bottles were calling to him from his cabin. "See they're marked! Take the girl!"

Goliath's padded forefinger touched the little cluster of black dots while his eye measured the midday position and the course, then very softly and silently he crept out on to the deck. The chant was deafening. His head swelled with the terrific uproar produced by the throbbing engines and the empty bottles in the cabin.

The second officer came toward Goliath, when the captain appeared upon

the bridge, and Goliath acted with unbelievable craftiness. He stepped back into the thick shadows and beckoned the second officer to him, then, as the unsuspecting officer came within hitting distance, Goliath brought the butt of his big revolver down with terrific force upon the poor devil's head.

The second officer dropped so quietly that the man at the wheel did not hear.

Goliath on tiptoes crept toward the wheel, his right hand uplifted. What a glorious chant he listened to! His drunken mind made a beautiful picture, a picture which stiffened his muscles as he struck.

"Isles of green! Off to port!" sang the empty bottles. "Hit him hard! Take the wheel!"

Goliath hit hard and the song of the engines grew. "Pile her up! Pile her up! Pile her up!"

The first officer, roused from a short nap, hurled himself upon Goliath Gamble at the very moment of the crash. The bows of the *Wapunga* were lifted as the steamer struck the inclined plane of a submerged atoll, there was an infamous grinding sound, queer spasmodic noises, a horrible choking, gurgling racket in the hold, then screams and cries of fear.

The chief officer's body acted as a buffer between the chart room and Goliath. The drunken captain rose to his feet, but the unfortunate Palmer was unable to rise.

The crash had a sobering effect upon Gamble, but the advice given by the empty bottles throbbed within his brain. He rushed from the bridge to the promenade deck, tore down the companionway and along the passage. Screams of fear came from the forward cabins as he rushed by, but Goliath ignored them. Once or twice a passenger stumbling into his path tried to question him, but he flung them aside. He wanted to save one person, to save her

and tame her; to prove to her that he was her master and that she was his slave!

She came through the doorway as he reached her cabin. A slight, girlish figure; the flame-colored cat in her arms. Goliath roared in drunken glee.

The girl turned and tried to escape, but the big hands of Goliath reached out like the feelers of an octopus and gripped her. Ki-San, the cat, resented the attack. The animal drove her claws into the fat face of the captain, and Gamble, cursing like a maniac, smashed the cat to the floor and took the girl in his arms. Then the *Wapunga* gave a quick lurch to starboard and the lights went out.

Goliath Gamble, with the screaming girl in his arms, fought his way up the aft companionway to the deck. The night was so dark that passengers and crew collided with each other. There was no order, no discipline. The noise was such that the screams of Marjorie Hartley were unnoticed except by one person. That person was the middle-aged woman in the second saloon.

By the faint light of a lantern the woman saw the struggle between the drunken captain and the girl, and she courageously tried to help Miss Hartley. It was a brave act, but unfortunate for the second saloon passenger. Goliath Gamble swung his big right arm and his enormous fist smashed into the woman's face. She fell upon the deck and the drunken captain stumbled over her as he rushed to the rail.

A faint splinter of light which crept from a port where some tardy passenger was searching with matches for his belongings, struck the bow of a boat which three of the fear-stricken crew had hurriedly launched with the idea of saving themselves. Goliath Gamble acted promptly. Holding the girl in his arms he climbed upon the rail and sprang. He missed the boat, but the three terrified rats which were in it

pulled him and the girl aboard when they heard his bull-like voice come from the water. They were cowardly wretches and they were pleased that luck had brought the big captain into their cockleshell. The Pacific, groaning like a banshee, seemed a dreadful place.

Goliath immediately took charge. Holding the girl's wrists he screamed his orders to the three. "Get hold of the oars, you lice! Pull! Pull, you rats! *Pull! She's going!*"

The three bent to the oars, driving the boat away from the stricken steamer. The *Wapunga* was slipping from the coral ledge, slipping quickly and quietly into the depths!

"*Pull!*" screamed Goliath. "*Pull!*"

A new note came into the cries from the deck. A sharp, piercing note of fear. A queer, throbbing sound came across the waters, a sudden, crackling outburst of unloosed steam and then silence. The *Wapunga* had disappeared.

Marjorie Hartley opened her eyes and looked about her. It was a bright, clear morning; the sea was a bare, blue spread of immeasurable dimensions. Goliath Gamble was asleep on the bottom of the boat, his huge legs affording a pillow for one of the three sailors. The two others, also asleep, sat back to back, propping each other in a position which would be exceedingly dangerous if the boat rolled.

Goliath Gamble roused himself. He kicked viciously at the sailor who was using the captain's legs as a pillow, and the frightened wretch muttered an apology. The captain's unshaven face was streaked with blood, a tribute to the sharp claws of Ki-San.

A diabolical leer came into the face of Goliath as his eyes fell upon the two sleeping sailors who were sitting propped against each other. His fat face was illumined by an unholy delight. Very, very cautiously he lifted an oar,

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climbed to his knees and made a terrific swipe at the two sleeping men. At the same moment he howled like a wolf.

The man struck by the oar was knocked violently against his companion, who had attempted to rise when Goliath howled. They made wild efforts to cling to the boat, but the crazy captain struck at their knees and over they went!

Goliath drove an oar into the water as they sank and shrieked an order to the third man crouching in the bows.

"Pull away from them!" he yelled. "Give 'em a morning bath! I told 'em to keep on pulling an' they went to sleep!"

The man did not obey, but the cursing Goliath seized another oar and drove the boat by vigorous strokes away from the two sailors who swam after it!

They gave up suddenly. The startled girl turned to look at the brute pulling, and when she looked back at the blue spread of ocean the two heads had disappeared. Goliath rested. "Weak-hearted rats," he growled. "No stamina. Now I'll settle with this mutineer who wouldn't do what I told him to do."

The sailor in the bow tried to protect himself, but Goliath's attack was irresistible. A swift, half dozen blows came down upon his arms, then the oar found a section of unprotected head, and the sailor dropped limply on the bottom of the boat.

Captain Goliath Gamble turned, wiped his perspiring face with a huge hand and addressed the girl.

"Now!" he gurgled.

He moved toward the girl, picking his steps. Her silence halted him as he stepped over the intervening seats, and he looked at her.

Into the wonderful stillness which was upon the Pacific came a queer gasp of fear. It came from Goliath G. Gamble. It came from his thick lips as they parted suddenly, the thick lips which remained apart as if afraid their re-

union would produce a duplicate of the distressing sound.

For a full minute Goliath gazed at the girl, at the quiet eyes, at the firm mouth, at the indecently stunted barrel of the revolver whose pelican belly was gripped by her right hand!

"So—so it was you?" he gurgled, and as he spoke, he dragged his left foot over the seat. "So it was my little hornet who came to the bad man's cabin. It——"

"Don't come any closer!" cried the girl. "I'll fire if you take another step."

"Put your little gun away," said the leering brute. "Put it away and let us talk."

"Don't move!" cautioned the girl.

"Now, now," murmured Goliath, his piggy eyes upon the gun. "I knew all along that it was you. That's why—that's why I piled up the ship to get you out here to explain. I thought to——"

He sprang forward suddenly, hurling himself at the crouching girl, but the snub-nosed automatic was alert. It barked while Goliath was in mid-air. He screamed and fell with a crash upon the seat, as the girl half rose, then the boat tipped violently, and the girl and the man were thrown into the water!

It was the *Lass of Sydney*, a copra schooner, that picked up Marjorie Hartley an hour after Captain Goliath Gamble, with a bullet in his stomach, sank in the cool depths of the Pacific. She was unconscious, but her small, wonderful hands were clinging to a pair of oars which were bound together with a little ribbon from her hair. A gallant person is Father Neptune.

A fever sprang upon her and she raved during the days that the *Lass* spent in beating up to Sydney. There was nothing upon her to tell her name or that of her friends, and at Sydney, the good captain transferred her to Prince Alfred Hospital.

There on a sweet, spring morning she woke to consciousness and questioned the nurse.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"In the hospital," answered the nurse.

"Yes, yes; but where?"

"In Sydney."

"Sydney?"

"Yes. You were picked up by a boat and brought here. No one knows your name or where you came from. Have you friends?"

"Yes, yes," answered Marjorie. "Send a message at once. Send to Phillip Hamlin, 13 Ormonde Street, Paddington. Tell him to come here at once. You—you are certain I am in Sydney?"

"Oh, yes," answered the nurse. "I'll send this message at once. You had better rest. You are not strong."

It was less than an hour before the nurse announced the arrival of the visitor. A tall, square-jawed young man came haltingly toward the bed, then, as the girl turned her beautiful face toward the light, he gave a wild spring forward and cried her name aloud.

"Marjorie!" he cried. "My Marjorie."

The nurse left them and in the soft silence of the ward the girl whispered to the man the story of the *Wapunga* and Captain Goliath Gamble.

"I—I tried to get him to confess so that—so that all the world would know your innocence," she murmured. "I knew you were innocent, but—but I wanted him to write down everything. Then we were wrecked."

"And—and Gamble?" gasped the young man.

In a whisper that he could hardly hear, she told of the happenings which took place after the wreck, of the small boat, the drowning of the two sailors and of Gamble's attack.

"Hold your head closer," she whispered. "Closer still! I'm afraid! I'm afraid of jails because—because I—I think of what they did to you. That is why—why I have not mentioned the name of the *Wapunga*. I told the nurse I—I could remember nothing. I—I— Come closer, sweetheart, I shot him!"

"You shot him?" he cried.

"Yes, yes," she breathed. "Don't look startled. Hush! That is why I am afraid! I want to go away before they—they question me. Will you—take me away?"

"Love of mine!" he whispered. "Dear, brave love of mine! Don't be afraid! We'll go to-morrow, to-day! I have a little place in the country where there are honeysuckle blossoms and mimosa trees and sweet sunshine, and you will forget. We will both forget. Let me stroke your head, sweetheart! There, don't cry! The dear God brought you to me in spite of everything, brought you on a fairy ship of gold with silver sails and little, green-jade anchors. The—the other ship was a nightmare, a queer, wild nightmare that you will never remember again."

He held her close and the soft, sweet shadows of the late afternoon filled the ward. There was a holy peace upon the place. The man's eyes were wet with tears. Far away on a news board in Market Street, San Francisco, a boy was posting a notice reading:

No news of the *Wapunga*. Six days overdue.

Berta Ruck's novels have an inimitable charm and holding quality which few authors achieve. Her latest and best novel, "The Arrant Rover," begins in the February AINSLEE'S. Order YOUR Copy Now.



Akin to Love

By Margaret Pedler

Author of "The House of Dreams Come True,"
"The Lamp of Destiny," etc.

TONY! At last!"

The exclamation was one of pure delight. The girl who uttered it made a movement as if to raise herself on the couch upon which she lay, then dropped back against her cushions, a brief spasm of pain contracting her young face.

Tony Kyrle's gay, blue eyes softened incredibly as he bent over her.

"At last! You demanding young person!" he replied, smiling down at the girl. She smiled back happily in answer; she always understood the little friendly, teasing note in Tony's voice. "Why, did you want me sooner?" he went on, pulling up a chair and sitting down beside the couch.

"I think I always want you." There was a shade of wistfulness in the answer. "I was afraid you were going down to the lake without coming in to see me."

"Of course not, honeyflower! I expect we shall keep it up down there till midnight or later, by which time all good little girls will be in bed and asleep."

He spoke with a sort of playful camaraderie, as if she were more child than woman. And, indeed, that was very much how he thought of her. She had been no more than a child when he had first found her, lying unconscious by the roadside, where she had been flung by a restive horse she was riding, and the seven years which had elapsed since then had passed without Tony's quite realizing that she had grown into womanhood.

The fall from her horse had been responsible for an injury to the spine and, although the doctors still maintained that recovery was possible, their hopes

in this respect had not so far materialized. Meanwhile, Margery Seymour spent her days on a couch, subject to more or less constant pain, and Tony Kyrle's frequent visits were the brightest spots in what was bound to be, at best, a very weary and shadowed life.

The acquaintance begun, through the medium of Margery's misfortune, had ripened into a close intimacy. Her parents, still young themselves, had taken an immediate liking to the tall, blue-eyed young man who had driven the child back to her home in his car on the day of the accident, and by this time they both regarded him more or less in the light of a younger brother, whose welcome to their house went without saying. During the war he had invariably spent his leave with them, having no home of his own—unless bachelor chambers could be counted as such—and when he had won the V. C. Mrs. Seymour had been as glad and proud as his own mother would have been had she lived to know of it.

On the present occasion he had come down to spend Christmas with them, and to-night, taking advantage of the intense frost which had sheeted the lake with ice for more than a week past, the Seymours had organized a skating carnival, to which half the neighborhood had been bidden.

"Is Mrs. Amery to be there this evening?" asked Margery presently, after making eager inquiries as to the proposed arrangements for the night's festivity.

A fleeting change of expression showed on Tony's face. For a moment his blue eyes darkened till they looked almost black.

"Yes, Marion— Your mother told me she was coming," he answered shortly.

"I'm so glad! You always like her, don't you, Tony?" He nodded, and she went on, "I don't see how any one could help liking her. She's so beautiful!"

"Yes. She's very beautiful." His voice sounded remote.

"And yet Janet—that's my maid, you know—told me this morning that Mr. Amery is dreadfully unkind to her. They even say"—her voice dropped almost to a whisper—"that he beats her!"

Tony made a sudden, jerky movement. Then he said angrily:

"Janet should hold her tongue. She's no business to tell you things like that! I suppose she's been gossiping with one of the Amery Hall servants. Why didn't you shut her up?"

Margery looked half scared at the sudden anger in his voice, and Tony continued indignantly:

"It's horrible to encourage servants' gossip about a woman like Mrs. Amery."

Margery's pretty head dropped. The least hint of disapprobation from Tony's lips was sufficient to bring dismay to her heart. Half child, half woman, his word was her absolute law.

"I didn't mean to— to encourage it," she stammered, the tears very near her eyes. "I—you know I love Mrs. Amery!"

"Of course you do!" Tony was filled with quick remorse. "Only you see, kiddy, if we are Carol's—Mrs. Amery's pals, you and I, we can't let people like Janet discuss her troubles."

Margery nodded soberly.

"Don't tell her to-night—will you, Tony?" she besought him anxiously. "She might be vexed that I didn't stop Janet from talking."

"Tell her?" Tony almost gasped. He couldn't quite imagine any one telling Carol Amery, with her delicate lit-

tle air of pride and aloofness, that one of the servants had declared her husband beat her! But—and at the mere thought his hands clenched—could it be possible that there was a grain of truth in the report?

Every one was aware that Bruce Amery and his wife didn't get on too well together. Rumor had it that at times Amery drank heavily, and it was common knowledge that he was a man of uncontrollable temper. Was it possible that in one of his violent rages he had actually laid hands on the frail, exquisite woman who was his wife? Tony felt sick at the thought.

As he walked across the park to the frozen lake, after bidding Margery a somewhat compunctious good night, his very soul rose up in revolt at the idea of Carol, *Carol*, subjected to any man's rough handling! It had been bad enough to know that she was tied to a sulky brute like Amery—she had let him see a little into the dark places of her life—but if Margery's tale were true, then matters must soon come to breaking point.

He strode on rapidly, the crisp film of ice which encrusted each blade of grass and fallen twig crunching with a little protesting whisper beneath his feet. Suddenly, from close at hand, the jovial, inspiring strains of a band blared forth on the frosty air, and a sharp turn in the path brought the lake into full view. Big bonfires blazed at intervals along its borders, so that the frozen surface was striped alternately with vivid patches of golden light, against which the darting figures of the skaters showed suddenly clear and distinct, and with stretches of gloom, mysterious with checkered moonlight, into which the figures disappeared and were swiftly blurred into vague, misty shadows. Colored Chinese lanterns, borne on slender bamboo rods by some of the revelers, flecked the scene with unexpected gleams of red and gold and blue,

looking like so many multicolored fire-flies skimming and dancing above the lake.

For a brief space Tony's eager gaze scanned the shifting crowd of figures. Then some unerring instinct took him straight to Carol's side. She was standing by the bank, alone for the moment, slim and pliant as a hazel wand. On the slender neck, circled by sable fur, her small head seemed to Tony poised like some delicate flower, and when she turned her soft, violet-gray eyes upon him he felt as if his heart had jumped suddenly into his throat.

Almost without greeting, the man and woman clasped hands and slid away together over the black, gleaming ice. They skated in silence—a silence which seemed to link them together, bind them more closely, than any words. It was not until they had reached the farther end of the lake that she spoke.

"Oh, Tony, it's good to have you back again!"

There was a little, breathless catch in her voice, something urgent and appealing, which stirred him to the depths of his soul.

"Have you wanted me? Tell me quick, Carol! Has he been making you miserable again?"

They were standing in deep shadow. A great blaze of light flung across the lake by one of the leaping bonfires seemed to cut them off from the rest of the world, hemming them in together in a little, shadowy world of their own, where there was no longer any need for pretense and dissimulation. She bent her head.

"Sometimes," she said, "sometimes I think I can't bear it any longer."

Impulsively he laid his hand on her arm and felt her flinch at his touch, drawing her breath sharply as if it hurt her. His face darkened ominously.

"Why did you wince like that?" he demanded quickly.

The silence which answered him was

more eloquent than any words. So it was all true—what Margery had told him!

"Carol!" His voice shook. "Carol, is it—has he dared to hurt you?"

Still she remained silent, her woman's pride shrinking from the question.

"Tell me!" he insisted sternly.

"It's only when—when he's been drinking too much, Tony," she said at last. "He doesn't know what he's doing then. He's always sorry afterward."

"Sorry afterward!" Look here, Carol"—Tony spoke with a certain grimness—"this has got to end! You'll leave him—leave him and come away with me!"

She drew quickly back from him.

"Oh, no, no, Tony! We can't do that!"

"Don't you care enough, then?" he said swiftly.

"You know I care!" Her voice throbbed. "You know I care! But sometimes I think, Tony, that what you feel for me isn't—love. It's just kindness and—and pity, and the dear, brave feeling that you can't bear to see a woman bullied."

"I can't bear to see you bullied! And I won't, either! Come with me, Carol! Dearest, let me take you right away. Then, later, when he's set you free, we'll be married, and I swear before heaven I'll make you happy."

His arms went round her, his voice, eager, beseeching, was in her ears, and for a moment she yielded, suffering herself to be drawn into his embrace. It would be so sweet, so unutterably sweet, to be loved and sheltered and cared for by this man whose very touch sent her pulses racing, the sound of whose voice thrilled her from head to foot.

"You will? Carol, say that you will!" he urged imperilously.

With an effort she drew away from him.

"Ah, no! No, Tony. I can't do that! Dear, it must be enough just to see you

sometimes—like this. I must *make* it enough! I—I haven't got the right to take any more."

"He's given you the right!" Tony said fiercely.

"No, he hasn't. Nothing could really make it right." She laid a light hand on his arm. "Don't ask me any more, Tony. It's too hard—to go on saying so. Please, dear!"

He stooped and brushed her hand with his lips.

"Very well," he said at last in a stifled voice. "But remember, Carol, if ever—whenever your life gets too much for you, harder than you can bear, now or ten years hence, I'm always there, waiting for you. One word from you, and I'll take you away and make you happy, dear!"

"I'll remember," she said gravely. "But—I don't think I shall ever say that word, Tony."

"So you're here!" A tall, broad-shouldered figure had skated up to them unnoticed, and they started apart at the sound of the sullen, angry voice. "So you're here, Carol! What the devil do you mean by hiding yourself like this? I told you I'd skate with you, and then, without a word to me, you go off with some one else!"

"I waited quite a long time and you didn't come, Bruce," replied Carol. "So when Mr. Kyrle asked me to go round the lake with him I did."

"Well, I'm here now." Bruce Amery ignored Tony's presence with an insolent deliberation. "So come along."

"I'm skating with Mr. Kyrle now," said Carol quietly. "I'll come with you later."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, my dear!" answered her husband jealously. "You're coming with me *now*! A married woman's place is with her husband. Come on!"

He stretched out his hand, but as Carol made no movement to take it, he

drew nearer and caught hold of her roughly by the arm.

"Do you hear?"

A sudden puff of wind blew the flames of the nearest bonfire toward them, and in the ruddy glare of their light Amery's face showed dark and convulsed with anger. The slightest opposition served to rouse his temper.

"Do you hear?" he repeated, at the same time gripping his wife's arm with a force which crushed the tender flesh excruciatingly.

"Don't! Don't, Bruce!" The cry was wrung from Carol's shaking lips despite herself, and Tony sprang forward.

"Let go, you brute!" he thundered furiously.

The next moment, a savage, well-directed blow from Amery sent him reeling backward, and before he could recover his balance the former had skated away, dragging Carol with him.

II.

Four days elapsed without Tony's being able to obtain sight or sound of Carol Amery. It was as if, when her husband dragged her away from him that evening on the ice, a shutter had descended, cutting him off from all communication with her.

By inquiry he had elicited the fact that the Amerys had been seen leaving the lake together. Apparently Bruce had hurried his wife off home without permitting her even to make her farewells to her hostess.

By the end of the fourth day Tony was nearly mad with anxiety. He had wild thoughts of driving over to the Hall in his car and asking to see Mrs. Amery, but maturer reflection bade him refrain. At the best, he would almost certainly be refused admittance, and, at the worst, it was possible that Amery, furious at his temerity in coming to the house, might visit his ill humor unpleas-

antly upon his wife. For her sake, Tony dared not risk it.

But at last, on the afternoon of the fourth day, as he was striding savagely homeward from a fruitless journey to the village, whither he had betaken himself in the hope of a chance meeting with Carol, a note was thrust surreptitiously into his hand. The bearer of the note was the Amery's under gardener, a pleasant-faced young fellow who, as Tony knew, was devoted to his mistress. Having delivered the missive, he slipped away again into the December dusk without waiting for any answer.

Tony tore open the envelope and, by the flickering light of successive matches, deciphered the faint, pencil-written contents of the letter. It ran:

It's no use, Tony. I can't bear it any longer. Since the other evening he hasn't allowed me out of his sight. But this afternoon he has gone off in the car, to stay with some people he knows, and he will not be back till Christmas morning. Will you come to me?

Tony crushed the letter into his pocket and, swinging round on his heel, made his way swiftly in the direction of Amery Hall.

Carol's eyes were unusually brilliant, and there was a nervous tensiety in her manner as she greeted him.

"I'm at the end of my tether, Tony," she said, speaking with enforced quiet. "I can't bear any more! If you still want me—I'll come."

He swept her up into his arms.

"If I still want you!" he cried.

The whole matter was very easily arranged. The next day, Christmas Eve, was to be the occasion of a dance given by the Seymours, to which Carol had, of course, been invited, and, since Amery did not propose returning till Christmas morning, it would be perfectly simple for Tony and Carol to disappear during the course of the dance and to be many miles away before

Amery could discover that they had gone.

"I'll have my car waiting," said Tony, "and if to-morrow you'll pack just the few things you'll need in a bag, I'll stow it away in the car some time during the day. Then, halfway through the dance, we'll slip off. No one will miss us for a little while. If they do, they'll only think"—with a brief smile—"that we're sitting out somewhere together. And you shall have the happiest Christmas Day of your life, Carol—far away from here, at a little country inn I know of!"

Her eyes searched his face.

"Tony, am I taking too much from you?" she asked. "Are you sure—sure that you'll never regret?"

"Sure," he said stoutly.

III.

"Do go up and look in at Margery for a minute, will you? She's dying to see your frock!"

Mrs. Seymour smiled as she gave Carol a little push in the direction of the staircase.

"You've plenty of time," she added reassuringly. "The dancing won't begin yet."

Carol nodded and sped swiftly upstairs to the invalid's room, where a cry of pleasure welcomed her entrance.

"Oh, Mrs. Amery, how darling of you to come up! I told mumsie to ask if you would."

Margery's eyes sparkled as they rested on the charming, chiffony vision in the doorway. She adored pretty clothes on pretty people with all the eager enthusiasm of one who was herself debarred from exploiting the mysteries of dress. There was something almost boyish in her frank, spontaneous admiration.

"Lift me up, Tony, so that I can see her better," she commanded. And Tony, who had been standing in the background, raised her with all the ease

of his splendid young strength and the deft skill of long practice. Margery thanked him with a glance, then riveted her eyes on Mrs. Amery.

"Doesn't she look a darling, Tony?"

"Quite a darling," he declared heartily. "But," he added with mock indignation, "you've omitted to remark that I look a darling! Am I not also arrayed like a lily of the field?"

Margery gave him a small, friendly grin as he sat beside her on the couch, supporting her with an arm about her shoulders.

"You're wearing a perfectly good suit—I'll go as far as that," she replied impertinently.

"Ungrateful female! I've a good mind to put you down on your pillows again instead of making a blessed arm-chair of myself while you pour out sticky compliments for Mrs. Amery's benefit."

Margery tucked herself more comfortably into the curve of his arm and laughed confidently. She had no fear of Tony's carrying out his threat. It was always he who knew just how to lift her without hurting her back, who waited on her hand and foot, and who was able to soothe her when the pain was almost more than she could bear. Often he had sat holding her in his arms for hours at a stretch, so that he was almost too cramped to move when at last sleep mercifully stilled the pain and he was able to lay her down once more on her couch.

"I think Tony spoils you," said Mrs. Amery, laughing gently.

"Yes. When he's away, I miss him dreadfully. You must never get married, Tony! I couldn't spare you," she added.

A silence followed the innocent little remark. Carol flushed suddenly and uncomfortably, while an odd, troubled expression leaped into Tony's eyes. His arms seemed to close a little more tightly around the slender, girlish fig-

ure which they held. An instant later Mrs. Seymour's voice was heard calling upon him to come and help her with some small detail of arrangement downstairs.

Margery's eyes followed him somewhat wistfully. Then she smiled up at Carol as the latter seated herself beside the couch.

"We all call upon Tony when we want helping," she said.

Carol was silent. The simple truth of the little speech knocked at her heart.

"He's the most wonderful person in the world, I think!" went on Margery happily. "Ever since my accident he's been down here constantly. Half the time I know he comes just to please me. When he used to come home on leave from the front it would have been ever so much jollier for him in town. A tiny village like this must have been frightfully dull for any one like Tony. But he never seems to think of himself."

As the girl chattered on, innocently revealing in almost every word she spoke how much Tony meant to her, Carol began to feel as if she were an outsider, an intruder. The close, friendly intimacy between the two was so evident. And it seemed as if for Margery Tony symbolized everything that was good in life.

"You think a tremendous lot of him, don't you?" said Carol, at last, baldly. Each word the girl uttered stabbed her like a knife thrust.

Margery turned upon her eyes which shone like stars in their radiant, confident belief.

"You would, too, if you knew him as I do," she answered quietly. "I think if Tony ever came—came below what I've thought him, it would kill me! Sometimes, you know, I've felt as if I just couldn't go on—the world seemed all black, and I was too big a coward to face it. And then I've remembered how

plucky things added voice, shining on H. Car floor denly "I—abrupt ing n in so move kisse a go "It n you. "Y swer As the wait The sciot the gay, knev tere aside libra grat dow F hav thin real she the jud kne cor che in we no we W no so

plucky and splendid Tony is when things are difficult." She paused, then added with a little dreaming note in her voice, "He's always been like a white, shining light to me. Like—like Christ on His cross."

Carol's chair grated sharply on the floor as she got up and pushed it suddenly back.

"I—I think I must go now," she said abruptly. "Your mother will be expecting me." Then, as Margery looked up in some surprise at the unexpected movement, she stooped over the girl and kissed her. "I'm glad you have had such a good pal in Tony," she said gently. "It must have meant a great deal to you."

"Yes. It means everything," answered Margery with simplicity.

As Carol descended the wide staircase, the strains of a lively fox-trot were wafted up to her from the ballroom. The dancing had begun, then! Conscious of a sudden violent distaste for the lights and the sound of music and gay, light-hearted laughter which she knew would greet her when she entered the ballroom, she turned hastily aside and made her way into the deserted library. A low fire still burned in the grate and, drawing up a chair, she sat down and stared into its dying embers.

Her talk with Margery seemed to have altered the entire perspective of things. Before that, she had hardly realized the full significance of what she and Tony were about to do. That their friends and acquaintances would judge them both and condemn, she knew, but it had seemed a matter which concerned themselves alone. If they chose to face the obloquy of the world in order to secure their happiness, they were surely at liberty to do so. And now, now she began to wonder if they were! Was any one ever really free? Were we not all so linked together that no one of us can sin without hurting some one else?

If she and Tony went away together, Margery would be left with her young, loyal faith and belief shattered into fragments. What was it she had said that Tony symbolized for her? "A white, shining light!" "Like Christ on His cross!" Carol repeated the words below her breath. And she—she was to be the one to draw him down from it, to rob this child, who had so little, of the one thing that mattered, her unshaken belief in all that was good!

And there was something else, too, something which Carol had vaguely sensed, but against which she had striven to shut her eyes. Margery was the woman Tony loved, although, blinded by his eager sympathy for her own unhappy life, by the appealing glamour which inevitably surrounds a lovely and unhappily married woman, he had not yet realized it.

But Carol had realized it. When she had seen them together just now, she had known. Her own love for Tony had shown her clearly that what he felt for her was not love itself, but that pity which is so much akin that it sometimes is mistaken for it.

She never knew how long she remained alone by the slowly dying fire, fighting the biggest battle of her life. But, when at last Tony came in anxious search of her and found her there, her decision was taken.

"I've been hunting everywhere for you," he said, switching on the light and advancing into the room.

She smiled faintly.

"Have you, Tony?"

Her eyes rested upon him rather wistfully as he stood there under the blaze of electric light. He looked so young and strong and splendid—a lover of whom any woman might be proud.

"Yes. Everything's ready. We'd better dance a bit—show ourselves in the ballroom. It will help to put people off the scent."

"I don't think it matters," she said slowly.

He stared at her.

"You don't think it matters?" he repeated.

"No. Because—because I'm not coming with you, Tony, after all."

She told him then—told him why she couldn't go. Her voice shook a trifle as she went on, but her eyes were steady.

"Margery loves you, Tony—and so I want you to marry her and make her happy. She deserves to be happy. I don't. And I believe that you—care for her. What you feel for me hasn't been really love—it's been a little glamour and romance—and a lot of pity, Tony, dear."

Tony's face was rather bitter.

"And your feeling for me? I suppose that, too, has been just 'a little glamour and romance?'" he asked harshly.

For a moment she was silent. Then she gave an odd little laugh and lied courageously.

"Yes. I suppose it has," she said.

"That settles it, then."

He turned aside, ashamed of something within himself which leaped at the thought of freedom. Then he realized that Carol was speaking again, speaking of his marriage with Margery.

"It would be a 'make-believe' marriage, but what else can there ever be for her? And you—you've been her make-believe saint!" Her voice rose hysterically. She felt her control deserting her. It was all so funny, so funny! With an effort she recovered herself. "But if you married her, Tony, she'd be utterly happy just because she was your wife."

He swung round toward her. She must know the truth, know the full value of the gift she was bestowing.

"It mightn't be a 'make-believe marriage,'" he said slowly and distinctly. "Didn't you know? That London sur-

geon who came down to see her the other day is absolutely sure he can cure her."

Carol caught her breath. Margery's happiness would be more complete, even, than she had thought.

"Still"—she forced the words through stiff lips—"still, I want you to marry her, Tony. I'm—I'm going back to Bruce."

There was a light under the study door. Carol could see the vivid, golden streak of it as she stood in the dusk of the faintly illumined hall. Then—then Bruce had changed his plans and had returned to-night! That meant he must have found and read the letter she had left for him, telling him she was going away with Tony. She had left it on his study table, propped up against the inkstand. She had intended to destroy it now, destroy it so that Bruce need never know how nearly he had lost her.

She wondered what he would do, now that he knew she had really meant to leave him? She didn't suppose for one moment that he would be heartbroken—he must have ceased to care for her in that way very long ago. But he would be furiously angry. Pride and jealousy combined might drive him to almost any extreme. Perhaps he would thrust her out of his house at once, in the dark of Christmas Morning while the dawn was still quivering low down in the East. There would be something grimly ironical about it if he did. Or perhaps— Her eyes fell on his hunting crop, with its long, leathern thong, which hung near the door, and she shivered a little. For a moment she was tempted to hide it—Bruce in one of his ungovernable tempers was scarcely responsible for his actions—and she lifted it down from the peg on which it hung. Then a certain dogged courage made her replace it. With a small, white-lipped smile she

turned away and opened the door of the study.

Bruce was sitting at the table. Under one hand, flung out across the polished surface, lay the letter she had left for him. His face was hidden on his arm. He made no movement; apparently he had not heard the light sound of her entrance.

She was conscious of a sudden rush of pity as her eyes fell on the broad, bowed shoulders. There was something so forlorn, so utterly desolate, about that big, lonely figure. She crossed the room to his side and touched him gently on the arm.

"Bruce, I've come back," she said.

He looked up. His face was drawn and haggard, scarred with intolerable grief, and, as he raised himself, she caught the metallic gleam of a revolver gripped in his hand.

"Oh, my dear! Did you care—like that?" The words broke from Carol in low, shocked tones. She had not for one instant thought of him as hurt or grief-stricken, but only as violently angry.

"Did I care?" he said in a queer, strained voice. "God knows I cared! I suppose you didn't know! I haven't behaved much as though I cared, have I?" he finished with a wry smile.

"No, you haven't," she answered with the direct simplicity which grows out of crisis.

"No," he acknowledged, "I haven't. I've been a brute to you, Carol. And yet, when I was in my right mind I loved you as other men love their wives. It's my cursed temper that's done it! I suppose—I suppose it's too late now to start again." He glanced at her with a kind of dull surprise in his face. "Why did you come back?" he asked curiously.

She responded to the question with another.

"Do you want me back, Bruce?"

"Do I want you back?" he exclaimed violently. "Does a hungry man want bread?"

She moved a few steps nearer to him.

"Then, if you want me, I'll stay."

"You'll stay?" He stared at her incredulously. "Do you mean you'll give me another chance? You'll forgive?"

She smiled a little.

"It doesn't seem to have occurred to you that I nearly ran away with another man?"

"Small blame to you if you did," he replied tersely.

She shook her head.

"Two blacks don't make a white. They never did and they never will." She paused. "Bruce, do you realize that it's Christmas Day? Suppose we each make the other a present of forgiveness—give each other another chance and start fresh?"

He made an involuntary movement toward her, then checked himself.

"Do you know what you're offering?" he asked roughly. "It won't be all plain sailing, you know. My temper isn't cured just because I want you, and it'll take a devil of a long time curing. There'll be ups and downs to face, my dear, before I can pull round. Are you prepared to go all the way with me?"

Carol looked at him with level eyes.

He drew in his breath sharply. Then his arms went round her.

"It's a pretty big Christmas present," he said.

And somehow Carol knew, from the way he said it, that he would not let the gift be given in vain.





"There's Corn In Egypt"

By Achmed Abdullah

Author of "A Simple Act of Piety,"
"The Lute of Jade," etc.

THE house had once been a stately residence that had sheltered crinolines and stilted Georgian silver and spindle-shanked, age-darkened mahogany. In those days it had been surrounded by a park where oak vied with larch and maple.

To-day it was renovated and properly mortgaged. To-day fumes of gasoline assailed its leaded, four-pane windows where once the scent had been of crushed, dried lavender and spiced pot-pourri in painted Bristol glass. To-day Broadway was about it like a tide carved out of stone.

The only remarkable thing about it was the front door, which was three-fourths of a foot thick and made of steel.

This door was a concession to the romance of those who crossed the threshold after ringing the bell four times—two long rings, followed by two short, staccato, hiccougthy ones. There was no necessity for it, since three Tenderloin police officials, a Fourteenth Street gutter politician who wore an incongruously medieval, honey-colored beard, and a Harvard-bred bigwig in Albany touched weekly checks—equivocally speaking, as the money was always

paid in cash—that ran to three, at times to four figures.

In its present incarnation, as the "Beefsteak and Kidney Club," the house had weathered the municipal storms of nearly forty years, including three hectic and quite inefficient reform administrations.

Its one reason for existence, was the oblong room on the first floor. Here a big, felt-covered table supported an elaborate roulette wheel and, grouped about the walls, was a number of smaller, round tables. In the evenings it was crowded with men. They came there solely to play.

None of them bore the hall marks which are supposed to stamp gamblers as a breed. No diamond solitaires were in evidence, no checked suits, no flashing eyes, no tightly compressed lips, no greedy, clawlike hands, no sweat-studded brows. On the contrary, there was about them a hard neatness reminiscent of pneumatic tires, and villas with blue-gravel paths, and vintage bourbon, and subscription tickets to the Metropolitan, and butlers in sober black. They were mostly rich men of the Street. New York knew the size of their pocketbooks from the size of their charity contributions. They came to

this house because the click of the roulette wheel and the rustling of the cards spelled to them a measure of soothing mental relaxation after the shrill turmoil of the Wall Street forum.

Most of them were under forty. The Street, *plus* Broadway, *plus* alcohol, kills quickly.

This, then, was the place where it happened, and the main characters—standing out from a background of club members, an obligato waiter or two, and a front doorman with a high nose and a crooked mouth—were three.

There was Farragut W. van Dorn.

There was Peter S. van Dissel.

And there was Cornelius Clinton van Alkemaade.

Look up the "Social Register," and you will find all three of them. Look up the memoirs of New Amsterdam, and you will find their ancestors: hearty Dutch patroons who sailed the gray seas in high-pooed frigates mounted with culverins, who prayed to a strictly Lutheran God, and who, not so long ago after all, traded in a few handfuls of chipped Orange guilders for some bully cabbage patches in the eventual vicinity of Wall Street.

Let us consider these three Knickerbockers one by one.

To-day, descending haltingly, protestingly, to the close of his life, Farragut W. van Dorn was a millionaire. He could not help it. For, all his life, he had never touched any question without a sweeping and whole-hearted reference to the particular benefit he himself would derive from it, and he had gone after the dollar with a selfishness that was both naïve and sublime. His was a name to conjure with in financial circles, and he was old beyond his sixty-three years, osseous, purse-mouthed, crane-necked, gray-faced. To-day he was clouded with that profound and brooding melancholia, that psychic dys-

pepsia, which dwells at the heart of success and gangrenes its core.

Fifty-odd years earlier, in a red-brick school across from St. George's on East Fifteenth Street, he had swapped marbles and penknives and an occasional early spring beetle with Peter S. van Dissel.

The latter had once been well to do—who, in New York, has not heard of "Van Dissel's Perfect Mocha Blend?"—but had squandered his fortune in the unprofitable process of carrying a stray leg of anybody's donkey. People had always taken advantage of him: There seemed no other reason for his existence. Still good looking, in spite of his years, with his thick thatch of snowy hair, his fine, bright, black eyes, his rosy skin and that little soft vagueness about his mouth, he was the man whom the women of the upper West Side called up at the eleventh hour and asked to please slip into broadcloth and starched linen and complete the party. He was the man who knew the cousin of the confidential secretary of Jefferson Stutz, the inaccessible Broadway producer, and—why, of course!—he would make sure that Mr. Stutz read Miss Taylor-Boaker's delightful play which she had written for the Red Cross theatricals at Piping Rock. Furthermore, he had an excellent, if perhaps too precious taste in frocks and frills, and discovered little shops in side streets off Lexington Avenue, where Madame Céleste or Jacqueline could copy the latest Paquin model for sixty-nine dollars. For all of which his friends despised him, quite gently, quite sympathetically, and when they said "Old van Dissel," the sounds awakened, so to speak, no thoughts in their minds. It was as if they had said "the sugar bowl."

Since his college days he had belonged to the "Beefsteak and Kidney Club." Once he had won or lost thousands of dollars there in an evening. To-day he played with meticulous care.

It was said that he lived by his meager winnings. His clothes were threadbare and well brushed, and the only valuable thing left him, which he had not sold, nor ever pawned, was a stickpin made of a single, large, rose-colored pearl that, in certain lights, showed a strange, deep-violet radiance.

Cornelius van Alkemaade, too, was a member of the club. He was a youngish-old man of thirty-four. Besides his name, his chief claim to social distinction was a jade cigarette holder ten inches long. His sister's husband, the Honorable James Rocksavage, captain in the Blues, referred to him, with British tactlessness, as "the family rotter—the sort of chap whom you wish drunk when he's sober and sober when he's drunk," and had once been heard describing him as looking like a "sport-in' churchwarden who settles his poker debts by dippin' his fingers into the offertory bag."

All this was not exactly fair. The real trouble with him was that he was hard-headed in the wrong direction; that life had brought him nothing except a pabulum of ill-assorted emotions and desires; that he never looked ahead of the passing hour's passion; and that, for over three years, this passion had centered around the perfect figure, the bright, doubting eyes, and the unlikely, russet-gold hair of Isobel Brown—a woman of a certain world which is born in lower Manhattan within the blotchy shadow of Brooklyn Bridge and as often as not dies there, but which in the intervening period flits up and down Broadway, with frequent excursions to Fifth Avenue, Westchester County, and even Newport.

She drove the hearts and the purses of men as breath drives a thin sheet of flame. She could not speak to an archangel without making him feel conscious of his sex.

And, for some hidden reason, psychological or physiological, Cornelius

van Alkemaade imagined that he was in love with her.

She looked up at him from where she lay on her Récamier couch, busy with a tiny, tortoiseshell-backed mirror, a rouge stick, and a powder puff worn into just that sort of pinkish, slightly oily consistency beloved by woman.

"Connie, darling," she said, "you rather bore me." There was a delicious curling of her lips, a lift of her eyelashes. "Would you mind going away immediately?"

He did not reply for a second or two. He rose, and paced up and down the salon which, overlooking Forty-seventh Street with a strident glimpse around the corner of Broadway, was perhaps a trifle overornate with its Empire tables of dull ebony garlanded with bronze; its walls of pale-blue and silver satin with elusive water-color sketches; its Kermanshah rug in claret and royal purple with unexpected arabesques in gamboge and taupe and vermillion; its mass of bric-a-brac, brittle Tanagra statuettes and carved ivories, opalescent Tiffany glass and Copenhagen porcelain and bits of creamy, gold-flecked Satsuma.

"I—" he stammered. He bit his lips. He blushed with an overwhelming sense of footling, ridiculous helplessness. "I—oh—"

"Yes, yes," she cut in, smiling with every unkind intention. "I know. You love me! You adore me! You worship me! Weren't you about to say that?"

"Exactly!" he replied, very sincerely and very ill-naturedly.

"Tremendously interesting, I am sure!"

He broke the short silence.

"Isobel," he began, "I would do——"

"You'd do anything for me? Yes? Connie, darling, I know you by heart, and—really—you don't thrill me. You're rather fantastically rich, but then everybody is a millionaire nowadays. Your name is quite delightfully

Holland-Dutch-Knickerbockerish—and that's a point in your favor, with everybody, right and left, babbling about Anglo-Saxons. You can play polo like a greased whirlwind, and you have a jolly taste in cocktails, Persian pussies, and gold teaspoons. But"—her voice was threaded with delicate malice—"you don't thrill me!"

"What difference does that make?" he blurted out savagely, stopping in front of her. "I love you——"

"So you said before."

"I'll say it again. I am mad about you. That's all there is to it——"

"Is it?"

"Yes. I don't give a snap of my fingers if you love me or not. I'm not the sort of ass who believes in—oh—personal equation, reciprocity, and all that sort of drivel, when it comes to a man's passion."

"But you don't thrill——"

"Shut up!" he interrupted brutally, and she lay back on her couch and roared with laughter.

"Why!" she cried. "Pretty good, Connykins! Pretty good for darling little Connykins! I almost like you when you talk like that!"

He read encouragement into her words. He dropped on his knees beside the couch, took her white, slim hand, and covered it with kisses.

"Isobel," he said, "I——"

"Connie!" she laughed a slow, liquid laugh. "Don't spoil it. Don't begin all over again. Don't be a bore and tell me again that you love me—that you'd do anything for me——"

"But I do!" he insisted stubbornly. "Just put me to the test!"

She yawned.

"Very well. I will—one of these days——"

She did, a week or two later, and the test, at first, seemed easy to him. She wanted a pink pearl—and he had the sort of bank balance which causes

even a paying teller to bow and talk softly.

"Right!" he said. "Buzz over to Tiffany's with me. I'll get you a string of them."

"I don't want a string."

"Eh?" He looked frankly incredulous; and she corrected her statement quickly.

"Not just now, I mean. Just now there's one certain pearl I want—a glorious pink pearl—and I asked the man who has it to give it to me——"

"Oh—you did?" he countered jealously.

"I did!" she laughed. "And he refused."

"Who's the man?"

"That darling old Van-Something-or-Other—you know——"

"I don't."

"Yes, you do! That well-brushed old chap who hangs around the Beefsteak Club. I met him first that night at Jeff Stutz's party—the one he gave for Mignon Lafarge—don't you remember? You were there—and young De Puyster with his latest flapper—and this——"

"I guess you mean old Peter van Dissel?"

"That's it. I saw him yesterday up at Eloise's—and I asked him for his pearl—it's a stickpin——"

"You've got your gall, Isobel!"

"Rather. But what can a poor working girl do if she wants to get on?" she laughed. "He has his gall, too. He refused—oh—in a nice, well-bred way. Told me he'd buy me another one as soon as the ghost walks. He was just a wee bit stewed, in a charmingly mid-Victorian way—and quite delightful, and, I repeat, very well-bred about his refusal. But, Connie, darling, I want the pearl!"

"I'll get it for you."

Late that night he strolled into the club. The usual sounds drifted into the lobby from the gambling room.

The voice of the French croupier—metallic, crisp, pitiless:

"Seventeen wins, gentlemen!"—and a sibilant sucking in of breaths, flavored with the tang of gold.

Other voices, confused, mumbling:

"Paroli—and the whole number!"

"The column!"

"Ready, gentlemen?"—this from the croupier; then an angry "*sh-shsh*" enjoining silence, a crackling of banknotes, a tense pause followed by the ball's little dry, dramatic click, and a soft-rasping noise as the croupier's rake swept the duffel board of the roulette table.

Van Alkemaade crossed the threshold and found Van Dissel at a small table laying out a solitaire deck, as was his habit before playing, to "try his luck."

"I'd like a few words with you, Van Dissel," he said unceremoniously, and drew him into the lobby where he broached the subject without more ado.

"How much for that pink pearl you're sporting?"

"It isn't for sale," came the answer, vague, embarrassed, rather apologetic.

"Five hundred?"

"I'm sorry!" The older man waved an ineffectual, pleading hand. "But I can't—"

"A thousand!" Van Alkemaade had been drinking. He was becoming offensively insistent. "You need the money, man. You're always cadging for dinners and cigars and—"

"I won't sell my pearl!" repeated Van Dissel, and just then the outer door opened and admitted Farragut van Dorn.

He had overheard the last remark. A lean, sardonic smile overspread his hawkish features. Van Dissel turned to him, with a queer little sob of relief, and, while the younger man walked away, muttering under his breath, the two older men bowed stiffly to each other.

"Ready, Peter?"

"Yes, Farragut."

And, a few minutes later, they were at a small table, deep in the twisted mazes of two-handed stud poker.

This nightly game was one of the unsolved mysteries of the "Beefsteak and Kidney Club."

From nine o'clock sharp until the stroke of midnight, they shuffled and dealt; had done so for many years—as far back as the front doorman with the high nose and the crooked mouth could recall; and only when one of them was sick or when Van Dorn was out of town on business—he never went away for pleasure—was the routine interrupted. Of course, occasionally, if the stakes were not too high, Van Dissel would join another table; so would Van Dorn—if the stakes were high enough. But never between nine and midnight. During those three hours nothing could keep them from their two-handed game.

They never addressed each other except in the clipped slang of the play:

"Your deal."

"Cut."

"Tilt it."

"Deuces wild."

They never exchanged another word until, at midnight, they would rise, settle the score, bow to each other with a stilted courtesy redolent of frilled shirt-fronts and hair watch chains and high satin stocks, and say curtly:

"It has been an honor, Farragut."

"The honor was mine, Peter."

A strange scene—night after night—which, for all its drab monotony, held somehow the spice of the tragic; and the club members often wondered and speculated.

They knew that there was no love lost between the two. For, after all, New York—the core of it, socially and financially—is a tight, clannish thing, and tales drift down the tide of the leaden years. There were still dowagers in cut velvet and emerald dog collars

who remembered the gossip of decades earlier.

"Yes," said old Mrs. van Rensselaer Potts to young Mr. Potts van Rensselaer, her nephew, "I recollect perfectly. Farragut van Dorn was in love with Faith Terhune. Such a pretty girl—the very image of Empress Eugénie, my dear! Why—that time at the De Puysters' ball, when she danced the schot-tische with——"

"What about Van Dorn?"

"She refused him, became engaged to Peter van Dissel, and died a few weeks before the nuptial date—wasn't it tragic, my dear? Have you ever noticed the pink pearl he wears?"

"Rather! Who hasn't—on Broadway and Fifth? It doesn't seem to go with his shabby cotton neckties."

Mrs. van Rensselaer Potts sighed.

"Poor Peter!" she mused. "Faith gave him the pearl. And, my dear, it was quite a scandal in those days. A young girl, just out of Chevy Chase, and most strictly brought up—to give a jewel to a man! Peter never married," she added, just a trifle morosely, "nor did Farragut——"

But all this was no answer to the question why they played, night after night, silent, absorbed; chiefly why Van Dorn was willing to.

As to Van Dissel, there was, of course, that story that he lived by his meager winnings; and, because of the story, also because of the fact that he never gambled for high stakes and always with tense care as if every nickel counted, the others did not often encourage him to join them. Thus the nightly session with Van Dorn may have been a godsend to him.

The latter, on the other hand, was a very rich man who liked to play for high stakes. Then why was he willing to play, three hours every night, for miserly stakes with a man whom he disliked? Why did he thus waste his

time? What profit did it bring him; or, if not profit, what satisfaction?

And, really, the answer to the riddle was as prosy as a problem in the rule-of-three.

As to Van Dissel, it was quite true that he wanted to play, had to play, needed his winnings to live; and there was nobody to sit across from him six nights in the week, except his old schoolmate.

The latter's motive was also quite simple. It was the cravings for revenge—that uncomplex, four-square emotion which, next to the complex emotion called love, is perhaps the greatest driving force in the world. He hated this man who, decades earlier, had won the heart of the sloe-eyed, black-haired girl who had been dearer to him than the dwelling of kings. He had never forgotten either the love or the hate. Nor did he intend to. His belief in the right of revenge was almost of the Old Testament in its crushing simplicity. His god was the God of Wrath, and before the altar of this god he stood up straight and unafraid.

Realizing that the loss of a ten-dollar bill meant more to Van Dissel than a hundred thousand to himself, he felt a slow flame of satisfaction, as of a deed well done, creep over his chilly old heart when, at the end of a card session, luck was with him and the other had to pay. For he wanted to make van Dissel drink the salt lees of life to the last drop.

Such was Farragut van Dorn: narrow, rigid; going his surly way, straight as he saw it straight; suppressing moral platitudes and ripping off emotional futilities. And the pink pearl in the faded old cotton necktie seemed to him a guerdon—it crystallized, somehow, in its rosy, purple-nicked depths, both his dead pain and his living hate.

It was so that night.

At the stroke of midnight he counted his chips.

"You owe me twenty-three dollars and fifty cents, Peter," he said.

"Yes——" A look of fear came into Van Dissel's eyes. Then he drew out a slim wallet and paid in full.

He, too, rose.

"It has been an honor, Farragut," he said.

"The honor was mine, Peter."

Peter van Dissel walked home that night. The nickels counted.

He turned east from Broadway, then south, where he lived in a little old square, named after a forgotten patriot, that had once been fashionable. To-day it was both the soul and the stomach—possibly interchangeable terms—of those who work with spade and pick-ax, with mattock and drill and blasting powder, who, with their brown Mediterranean strength, hew the arteries of New York from the living rock. One heard no English here; only explosive Italian and, occasionally, the feline undertones of a Balkan nondescript.

He reached his house. It was a tenement building, gray and tubercular, incongruously baroque in spots where the contractor had got rid of some art balconies and near-marble struts left over from a bankrupt Bronx job. He entered his room. Next door, he could hear voices raised in high laughter. Antonio Baccigalupo, the jolly, bull-necked Sicilian, had taken to himself a bride of his own people the day before; and they had spent a dollar for a bottle of Chianti, another for bread and mushrooms and oil and garlic to turn into a dish worthy of a Sicilian—or a king.

The spicy aroma drifted into Peter van Dissel's room. He was hungry. So he did what hungry people do. He went to bed.

Just about the same time, Cornelius van Alkemaade was catching the tail end of a slightly alcoholic lecture from Isobel Brown's cupid-bow lips.

"What?" she demanded. "You haven't got the pearl? You haven't got it? Say—you make me sick——"

Deep in her tinsely, painted soul, she hated this man and the class, the civilization, the tight, self-satisfied bourgeois traditions he stood for. She hated him more because she needed him and his ilk. So, when she lost her temper with him, she suffered all extremes and knew no mean. She forgot her carefully acquired Regent Street accent. There was ready to her memory and tongue, her former world below Brooklyn Bridge, its biting slang, its slurred, mean intonation, its full-flavored abuse; and she turned the full stream of it on Van Alkemaade, who sat there, his arms around his knees, staring morosely at his perfect, bench-made cordovas.

When she had exhausted her breath and her vocabulary, he looked up. He was flotsam on the tide of his passion.

"All right, all right," he said meekly. "I'll get you that pearl. I swear I will, Isobel——"

"Well—if you don't—there's young Van Alstyne——"

"Oh, damn it all, girl! Stop deviling me! Didn't I tell you I'd get it for you?"

"You better, cutie!"

But, try as he might, he was unable to persuade Van Dissel to change his mind, though he increased his bids by hundreds, then by thousands, and though every day he became more outspoken in his stinging insults:

"You beggar! You damned old cadger! You——"

Peter van Dissel paid no attention to the brutal invective. He hardly resented it. For he knew what his own class as well as what Broadway thought of him; and three decades of indolent poverty and genteel degradation had rust-spotted his heart and scabbed his soul.

Still, in that hectic jumble of inherited qualities which makes up the hu-

man character, often the half-forgotten ancestral strain, the one which seldom has the chance, nor perhaps the desire, to come to the surface, is really often the most telling; and while there were, ready for the immediate usage of Van Dissel's psychic ego, the worthless and frothy qualities inherited from his more recent ancestors, there were also other strains in his racial mosaic. Chiefly was there a certain Dirk van Dissel who, late in the sixteenth century, had fought his stout little sloop, armed only with one brass cannon, against a Spanish man-of-war that mounted sixteen pieces, had lost the battle and been captured, and, given the choice between swearing allegiance to Philip of Spain and swinging from the yardarm by the neck, had unhesitatingly chosen the latter alternative.

Peter van Dissel had inherited something of Dirk van Dissel's character—and it came out unexpectedly, disconcertingly.

"I won't sell my pearl!" he said again and again. "I won't!"—mild, vague, embarrassed—yet stubbornly resolved.

And then the younger man would mouth incoherent curses.

He, too, became more stubbornly resolved, day after day. It was not only because of his twisted passion for Isobel Brown or because the girl did not leave him a moment's peace, greeting him whenever they met with the sneering query: "Well, Connie? Have you got it?" It was also, and after a while it was chiefly, the fact that the acquisition of the pink pearl had become an obsession with him, a pathological abnormality; and, in the throes of this obsession, he would watch the older man, at the club, night after night, to find the weak spot in his armor.

Subconsciously he may have thought of assault and battery, would have done so had he belonged to a lower, and, by the same token, a more honest class of society. But generations of wealth and

ease had dieted his smoldering, natural brutality into thin-blooded pettiness, into a mean wreaking of malice. Not that he was a coward—no Van Alkemaade has ever been—but his courage was honeycombed with a number of small, rather dangerous mental reservations.

So he watched the other until, one night, he made a discovery. He made sure the next night that he had not been mistaken, and doubly sure the third and fourth, and then he telephoned to Isobel Brown and told her she would get the pearl to-morrow.

"So you promised me before," she said.

"I mean it this time!"

He found Van Dissel—it was a quarter to nine—at the small table, playing double-Canfield solitaire.

"I want to talk to you," he said.

"Please! I've told you often—I'm not going to sell my pearl—"

"Better come! It's important!"

Van Dissel shrugged his shoulders wearily. He rose and accompanied the younger man into the lobby.

"Well?" he asked. "What's the matter?"

"This!"—and Van Alkemaade bent and whispered a few rapid words into his ear. "Do you deny it?" he demanded, straightening up.

"No!" replied Van Dissel, in a low, steady voice.

"No!" he repeated; and then, as if to himself: "This last month—I—I lost so much—so much of the little I have left—"

He was silent. He stood very still. Only his left eyelid fluttered nervously. He could not control it.

"I'm a sportsman," said Van Alkemaade. "You let me have that cursed pearl—and I'll write you a check for two and a half thousand. That's fair, isn't it?"

"And, if I refuse—what then?"

"What d'you think?"

"You'll—oh——"

"Right as rain, Van Dissel!"

The latter shook his head.

"I can't sell that pearl," he said. "I will not—d'you see——"

Van Alkemaade stared at him, utterly incredulous.

"You—you mean that?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You realize that I'm not bluffing?"

"Yes."

"Then——"

Van Dissel smiled a queer smile. There was that ancestor of his, that Dirk van Dissel, whose stubborn Dutch neck had been broken from the Spaniards' yardarm.

"As to that," he said, "I guess I'll just have to take a chance. Perhaps they won't believe you. Perhaps—oh well——"

He was silent. Then, suddenly, he added:

"You know—I'm getting rather old, sometimes——"

"Forget it!" cut in the younger man. "Don't pull out the sympathy stopper! I've made you my last proposition."

"You misunderstand. I wasn't asking for your sympathy. I only meant to say that I'm getting old, and so—well—I'm again believing in God. Damned silly, isn't it?"

And he walked back into the gambling room and, a few minutes later, he bowed courteously as Farragut van Dorn came in.

"Are you ready, Farragut?"

"Yes, Peter."

Shortly afterward, Cornelius van Alkemaade came from the lobby. His narrow face, that sloped wedge-shaped to a pointed, cleft chin, was deadly white but for the hectic red spots on his cheek bones. He had thought over Van Dissel's last words; had guessed—and rightly guessed—that, somehow, these last words, this incongruous and sudden profession of faith, contained

the other's final, hard, immutable refusal.

He was in a cold rage. All sobering thoughts had receded from his brain, leaving it dry and crimson. He knew that the pearl was lost to him and, with it, Isobel Brown.

He thought of her narrow, pleasurable hands. Then he thought of De Puyster, of Reggie van Alstyne—of all those who had come before, who would come after. And again he thought of her hands, of her slow, white smile flashing through the purple of the night, of the flowery scent of her russet-gold hair.

His heart was as still as freezing water. He stared into the other room, through the smoke-laden atmosphere. He could see the pink pearl in the faded old cotton necktie. It seemed to leer and wink——

He made up his mind.

Gambling in the "Beefsteak and Kidney Club" was a dignified, almost a hierarchic function. There was no unnecessary noise: only the staccato announcements of the croupier, the rustle of the cards, the sharp naming of the bets, the dry click of roulette ball and ivory counters—once in a while a rapidly suppressed cough.

Otherwise silence. And so Van Alkemaade's entrance was sufficiently dramatic—even for Broadway.

"Gentlemen!" he said, in a tense, headlong whisper, as he crossed the threshold. "Gentlemen!" His voice peaked, cracked the least little bit. "Listen——"

And, as everybody looked up, he went on, as cold and passionless as fate:

"I've watched Mr. van Dissel these last few days. I've watched him play with Mr. van Dorn. And—it's my duty to inform you—he cheats! Yes! Cheats! Ask him! Ask him—if you don't believe me——"

Came silence.

Staring eyes looked at Peter van Dissel. Tense, mute lips asked questions.

But, before Van Dissel could form pitiful, futile words of denial, Farragut van Dorn turned to Van Alkemaade. He did not rise. He spoke in a soft, careless drawl:

"You're a young jackass!"

Then, still without rising, picked up the deck of cards and commencing to shuffle, he turned to the crowd.

"The cat's out of the bag," he began. "Look here, gentlemen——"

In after years, Farragut van Dorn was never quite sure in his own mind why he did what he did that night. He hated all sentiment, called it "pap" and "tommyrot." Thus he denied vigorously, both to himself and to Van Dissel, that his old friendship for the latter, memories of school years in the little red-brick building on East Fifteenth, came back to him with a sweep and a blinding, sweet rush during this moment of sordid, drab crisis. Too, it seemed ridiculous to assume that, as he looked at the other, the picture of Faith Terhune should have smiled at him from the purple-nicked depths of the pink pearl. He preferred to believe that his motive for doing what he did was quite

selfish: he had played this nightly game of two-handed stud poker for many years, it had become a habit with him, he did not want to upset the pleasant routine.

At all events, whatever the reason, he turned to the crowd.

"Look here, gentlemen," he said. "I suppose it's going to be a howling joke on me and Van Dissel, and you'll tell it all over Wall Street and the Avenue and Broadway. But—it's quite true. Van Dissel amuses himself once in a while by palming a card or dealing from the bottom of the deck. Well"—he smiled, shuffled the deck—"so do I!"

"What?" asked Van Alkemaade. "You mean to say that you, too——"

"Yes, yes," said Van Dorn. "But—I assure you on my honor—we do it only when we play with each other. It's—oh—the innocent pastime of two silly old codgers. He knows that I cheat—and I know that he cheats—and so there's no harm done——"

And, amid the laughter of the crowd, he turned to Van Dissel.

"Ready, Peter?" he asked.

Then, with his trembling old hands, for the first time in his life, Farragut W. van Dorn dealt himself a card from the bottom of the deck.



DILETTANTISM

I LOVE the maid who has no courage

To love me.

The clever tremor in her throat,
Her teasing smile at table-d'hôte,
Her timid, racy anecdote,
Amuse me.

I hate the maid who has the courage

To love me.

The vast surrender in her eyes,
The thick profusion of her sighs,
Her brutal horror of all lies,
Appall me.

LAURENCE VAIL.

The Girl Who Was Staying In the House

By Marie Van Vorst

Author of "Big Tremaine,"

"Mary Moreland," etc.



CERTAIN people are distinguished by their possessions; without a country house copied after a château in the old country, surrounded by expensive lands, they would be unknown, their names mentioned only as their places are pointed out to the passer-by. On the contrary, certain other people render their possessions distinguished.

Where four roads meet, back far enough to be clear of the dust of the highway and the rumor of motors, Mrs. McLane's little house is a landmark in Westbury; silvery gray with age, compact and sweet, its roof falling low like blinders over discreet eyes, it is a mother-of-pearl button on the splendid coat of the district. Millions of dollars rolled around it, but it represents not even a steady income! The handsome owner was a writer who sometimes made a great deal of money and more times did not. She, however, made many friends, albeit she had lost one, and loved and was loved in turn. She kept open house over week-end and every one was crazy to go, and only a few went; congenial twos; certain threes; but the little house was "parvased apta" and the scale of its running small. Mrs. McLane permitted it to be called "The Little Gray Home in the West" once or twice, and then she protested.

The girl who was staying in the house,

not Mrs. McLane's house—Cynthia Moore did not know Mrs. McLane, but she was dying to be asked to her week-end parties, the girl who was staying at the Herefords' at Waybrook—had not been down to Long Island since she had acted as bridesmaid at Patricia Hereford's wedding. The last time she had seen the Italian music room it had been full of wedding guests gathered to bid good-by to the daughter of the house, Mrs. Nolly Rolland, the bride. Now the dancers of the Christmas ball moved slowly through the room to the fox trot like spirits of joy, and Cynthia Moore was one of them. She stopped close to one of the French windows to catch her breath.

"Come inside the curtains and look at the snow, will you?"

The man who had been dancing with her drew her into the deep embrasure between the curtains and the window. There the outside blinds had not been shut, and over lawns, woodland, and drooping slope to the glass houses the sparkling snow lay under a cordial Christmas moon.

Her partner went first, and the curtains fell behind the girl's supple young figure in its leaf-green dress as she followed, leaving the dance room behind her.

"Do you suppose that every one of the four windows has a pair of——"

"Lovers?"

Henry Snaith finished her sentence for her. He adored seeing her blush a scarlet that quickly got mastery over tan and brown, for Miss Moore was as much a part of the outdoor world of field, of wind and weather, as a dryad. She suggested a woodland creature more than a society girl, and Snaith sometimes lost her in the ballroom and liked her best in golf things or riding habit, but to-night in her leaf-green dress he had never seen her look so well. She did not take the word he suggested.

"I call them flirtations, if every one of the windows conceals a flirtation? I can guess them all; can't you?"

"No. They don't interest me."

"Of course not!" she exclaimed. She had been studying him for three months, and she thought she understood him. "You are not altruistic. You care only for the things that center around yourself."

"That's masculine! Women waste a lot of energy over things that have no real bearing on their happiness."

"Speaking of flirtation," she said in a low tone and pointing out of the window, "look there!" Outside on the porch near one of the pillars two of the dancers who had come out of the ballroom talked together.

"It is Mrs. McLane!"

Snaith did not look out of the window.

"She will catch a dreadful cold," he said practically.

"But she is only with Tommy Hereford!" said Miss Moore in a tone of disappointment, and turned smiling to her companion. Snaith was amused.

"Then you don't think poor Hereford dangerous?"

Cynthia shook her head wisely.

"You can never tell how dangerous a man is until you have flirted with him."

"I see," said Snaith, "how well you

understand the sex! But I assure you that all women are terribly dangerous."

Miss Moore was enjoying the moment enormously. She liked nothing better than to have him to herself.

"It depends what you mean by danger," she said.

"Oh! I mean by danger," returned Snaith, "falling in love so desperately that you can never do it over again. That's danger and spoils all the fun! But I am much more interested in what you think about it."

They had been together constantly for three months; he had seen her more than he had seen any other woman, and she thought he was the cleverest man she had ever known. But her experience of men was limited, she was only twenty-two and something of a country girl, born and bred in the South in an old colonial house. There she had lived with a dreary aunt. The gay times of her life had all been at the Herefords on Long Island, where she had come often from school with Patricia, the daughter of the house.

"Tommy flirted with me when I was out here for Patricia's wedding."

Snaith exclaimed hotly, "Why, he is as old as I am! He ought to be ashamed of himself!"

Miss Moore looked at him with serious eyes and the blood rushed to her cheeks.

"That doesn't matter in the least! Please don't say such things, I don't like to hear them."

"On the contrary, it matters a great deal."

He found her eyes clear as certain woodland pools, which, when he had gone hunting, he had seen, lying in the shadow. He had looked into them too many times for safety during the last three months.

"It matters an awful lot."

She started to speak, but she was determined to be wise and grave and abruptly changed the subject.

"Isn't Mrs. McLane simply wonderful?"

"Is she?"

"She is the most fascinating woman I ever saw! But she is of the older set, and won't bother with me. I wish she would—I think she is simply great."

Here some one—two some ones, pushed aside the curtains as though to come in into the concealment of their embrasure.

"I beg your pardon!" The curtain dropped.

Cynthia laughed. "We mustn't be selfish. There are only four windows! I ought to dance this with Tommy, but he has forgotten me. It certainly looks like it!"

She did not move, but stood laughing at Snaith, more mature, more daring, more woman than he had seen her in the three months of their friendship. She drew her scarf between her fingers, her arms were beautifully modeled, but brown as Diana's. They had played a great deal in the South together, he knew how she could swing her club, how well she walked, now he wondered, and he had wondered the same before, "How would Cynthia love?" And every time his senses asked this question he made himself say he had no right to her and forced himself to count the years between them and to think them an insurmountable barrier.

"Oh, yes!" he said, "the difference in our ages makes an awful difference—a cruel difference."

"How silly!"

She was smiling gently, drawing her scarf through her hand.

From the other room came to them the sound of the dancers' feet, and the whirl of their passing like night creatures or lightly blown leaves on a summer wind and the music suggestive and stimulating filled their veins with its rhythm. Snaith kissed her and Cynthia returned his kiss, and as he held her he seemed to be holding a woodland thing

after too short a chase, with the fragrance of the forest about her.

"When will you marry me, Cynthia?"

She drew away from him.

"Not too soon! I've never been engaged before. It is my first! Most of the girls I know have been once or twice already."

Snaith found her more adorable with every word.

"Thank heavens! I'm in luck. When will you marry me?"

Cynthia drew him back from the window. Mrs. McLane and her host, Tommy Hereford, were languidly going down to the big door.

"We must go back."

She lifted her face to him as a child might have done. "Kiss me again."

And Snaith never forgot her look of unworldliness as she said:

"Of course it is not your first. I couldn't expect *that* or ask it!"

He lifted her face up and looked into it steadily.

"You see you already touch the cruel difference that there is between us, Cynthia."

And she exclaimed hurriedly.

"I *don't* ask—I don't ask anything!"

"I can tell you," said Snaith gravely, "there has never been anything like this."

Then he kissed her, and they went back into the room and danced out onto the floor and their figures became part of the whirling figures of the blown leaves of pleasure.

"Pat, it is a perfect ball!"

The bride, Mrs. Nolly Rolland, for whom the ball was given, and Cynthia Moore had stopped dancing. Cynthia felt that she had changed terribly since she had gone behind those curtains and returned into the ballroom. She considered herself now an interesting member of society. She was engaged to a man older and more important than

any of her contemporaries. She wanted to rush upstairs with Patricia and talk things over, as they were in the habit of doing after a ball.

"Pat, isn't it a perfect ball?"

She looked for Snaith, but he was not there, or she would have told Patricia probably at once. Patricia was humming the tune of the one step, she could hardly wait to get back to the dance. Cynthia had not seen her since her wedding day, where here in this very music room she had kissed her good-by as Patricia went off for her wedding journey.

"You are awfully happy, Pat, it shows!"

Patricia exhaled happiness.

"Whom do you think I saw in California? Do you remember Ralph Ramsay, who was here at my wedding?"

Here a man came and he slipped his arm around Cynthia's waist, and as she started to dance out with him she called to Patricia.

"Stop in my room, darling, on your way upstairs?"

Close to the big hall door Henry Snaith talked to Mrs. McLane, rather Mrs. McLane was talking to him, and he stood, his hands in his pockets, as he had done in the embrasure of the window looking down on the floor hard. As Cynthia danced with her partner past the two, an undreamed-of feeling stirred in her and took its place alongside the acute happiness of her engagement and the first kiss. Cynthia danced as she played golf, but now not to spoil her partner's pleasure had to force herself to remember that she was dancing. She longed to be upstairs alone to think, to look at the novel aspect things had for her. She was going to be married to Henry Snaith, wonderful! Wonderful!

Perhaps Nell and Tommy would give her a spring wedding at Waybrook! She had no father and mother—only a dreary old aunt down in Delaware and

Nell and Tommy adored her. The music changed to a hesitation waltz. She stopped dancing, she could slip upstairs without being missed, and she would wait for Pat to pass on her way to her room.

But she couldn't go upstairs without bidding Henry good night. Happy, excited, but far too untroubled for a newly promised woman, awfully proud of her possession of a real lover, expectant of the best and the greatest things, scarcely sure that it was true, she went out into the hall and she made her way among the dancers, through a little group of men at the door. Mrs. McLane caught her eyes again as she stood just there, as she stood before, and the man by her side was still Henry Snaith. Cynthia heard her say:

"But you will take me home, won't you? My car is here. Just for to-night for old-time sake." She heard Snaith answer, "No, not to-night, Mary." Then he saw Cynthia and came quickly forward and joined her at the foot of the stairs.

As she put out her fine, frank hand to him she said gently:

"I am tired. I am going up."

Snaith met her look with untroubled content, and his expression was so satisfactory that she smiled and put out the other frank young hand—gave both—and Snaith, as he took them, saw the vivid blush that he adored colored her cheeks.

"Oh! I can't let you go up so soon! Come back with me."

She shook her head. "I'll see you here to-morrow at ten, shan't I? And please don't speak to any living soul about it. Not a living soul!"

"I want to tell every one."

"Promise me?"

"Of course everything."

She left her door half open and sat down before her fire. The room was done in cretonne, girlish and bright, it was always hers when she came to Way-

brook. As children bring treasures home she had brought here her friendship with Patricia, insignificant love affairs, and now before her fire she looked triumphantly at her new possession. It lay on her lap like a jewel, as the firelight played in it there were suns and sparkles in its depths, but as well-dark places which the light could not reach.

She had heard a good deal about Henry Snaith before meeting him here at Patricia's wedding in October, and from the first day that they had played golf together here until to-night their mutual memories were about out-of-doors sports, hunting, long walks, and games, and comings home to talk sport over before autumn and early winter fires in long twilights.

After the wedding Miss Moore had gone to Washington, Snaith was there looking for a political job, and they had seen each other uninterruptedly. But she had been shy in writing about him to the Herefords. She had never mentioned him in any of her letters to her friends.

Relaxed and tired from a day of exercise and an evening of dance she dreamed. The fire of Snaith's devotion had fascinated and flattered her, flattered her indeed into what had seemed love. As she wondered what Mrs. McLane's words had meant, a strange feeling of anguish was stronger than her happiness, and as she turned it over the jewel of new possession seemed to lie in her hand, dark as an uncut stone.

Patricia Rolland knocked at the door and slipped softly in.

"Hello, Cinny! I can only stay a minute. Nolly has come up, too."

And Cynthia realized the change that had come to her suddenly. They had used to talk over their balls until morning! Now Pat must run off to the man who had "come up, too." Mrs. Rolland sat down on the arm of Cynthia's big chair.

"You're such a peach, Cynthia, I hope

you'll get the best kind of man—a man like Nolly!"

For some reason or other, the thousand things Cynthia had wanted to tell her chum stopped at her lips.

"Do you know that out there in the West, I dare say you think I am crazy, but when Ralph Ramsay came up to me I seemed to see you with him, you two together, like a dream!"

"Dream again," smiled the girl in the chair. "Dream true. There is nothing in that, Pat."

"Is there anybody?"

"Suppose I say Henry Snaith." Cynthia laughed, watching Pat, and shy for the first time in their friendship.

"But you *won't* say Henry Snaith," affirmed Patricia calmly. "He is miles too old for you, Cynthia! And what about Mrs. McLane?"

Cynthia Moore started. Now she did not want Patricia to read anything in her face, and the new feeling became real, had a name. She had no confidences to give Mrs. Rolland, and Pat got up.

"I am going on dreaming about you and Captain Ramsay. I shall, until you tell me something else! Good night, darling."

And Cynthia let her go to the door and the hall unchallenged. She would take to bed doubt and suspicion and an anguish suddenly hers, but she would not ask a question of any one but the man.

Cynthia had many times danced all night out and seen morning through the ballroom windows, she had talked over the balls with her chum and slept until noon next day to make up for it, but never, never until now had she known what a real *nuît blanche* meant! She had never stayed awake for a sentimental reason in her young life! This she did after the Christmas ball. She did not want to face her friends the next day, and she took an early morning train to town before any one was up,

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leaving a note of good-by for Mrs. Hereford.

She wanted to talk to Henry and have it out with him, before she saw anybody else. She wanted to run home like a child and be safe in the shelter of the nest for the first storm! She simply couldn't see Henry at Waybrook. Waybrook had only been a place for perfectly wonderful times, full of life and amusement, a place for play, not for serious moments. To her quiet home, far from the bustle and glory of the smart Long Island place was where she wanted to go, to be happy or unhappy. If she had to give Henry up, she wanted to do it at home!

She took her chair in the train for town and settled herself, pale with watching, still keyed to a pitch of high excitement. In the chair next hers absorbedly reading a magazine, was Mrs. McLane; at ease, dressed in the best possible taste, calm and unconscious that she was face to face with a young and turbulent rival!

Mrs. McLane, an indulgent smile upon her lips, was reading one of her own stories in a magazine as though she forgave its faults and was content to see it at last before the public. The sight of Mrs. McLane was like a cold shower to Cynthia, and as she was quite unobserved, she looked hard. Mrs. McLane was not old at all, not old enough, not more than thirty! She was dressed with great simplicity and good taste, and possessed of all the nameless attractiveness that goes to make a woman adored by a man. Cynthia remembered what Henry Snaith had said, "I call danger, falling in love so deeply that you can never do it again," and she believed that if a man cared for this woman he was likely never to get over it!

Mrs. McLane had on soft, low shoes with rare old buckles. She was as cool as a flower by the Alpine stream and as untroubled as a waveless lake. From

her shoes to her small dark hat on a small dark head she was utterly charming.

"Henry is evidently crazy about dark hair," Cynthia thought. Her own was the color of August wheat. Mrs. McLane's eyes she could not see, but she remembered perfectly that they were Irish-blue and full of humor and laughter. The evening before at dinner she had noticed them and the crinkly lines about her eyes when she laughed. Mrs. McLane was entirely unconscious that she was being studied by the pale girl in the next chair. Indeed Cynthia absorbed her as a lover might do, for jealousy is sometimes as powerful a mirror as love.

When Mrs. McLane glanced up, the amused expression still on her face, she met Cynthia's dark, tired eyes.

"How do you do, Miss Moore? What an early start for a day after a ball!"

"But you danced at the ball, too," said the girl, shaking hands with the woman who had kept her awake all night.

"Oh! I went early," said Mrs. McLane, "and left you dancing. Wasn't it a beautiful ball?"

"Quite perfect."

"And how charming Patricia Rolland looked and how happy she seemed!"

"She is!" said the girl almost severely, as though she would say, "People can be happy in spite of everything!"

Mrs. McLane had never heard of Miss Moore in her life until the night before, when the girl had struck her as being lovely to look at and she had asked to meet her. They talked together all the way to New York of nothing and everything, and Cynthia had but one dread, that by some chance or other something personal might lead them to speak of Snaith, and she kept away from every topic which could lead her into the dangerous zone. Absorbed, unhappy, curious, and suspicious, yet far too delicate-minded and

well-bred to try to find out anything, the poor girl was at her worst and shy, but she pleased the fastidious older woman. Mrs. McLane herself was very much spoiled indeed and very nearly tired of everything and everybody.

As she always did when she liked a person she tried to charm this young girl, and in spite of herself Cynthia could not hate her thoroughly. There was nothing about her that was not agreeable, her voice, her eyes, her smile, her gracious attention to everything that the younger woman said. And, finally, when she left the train at Mineola, she said:

"It was good luck, your going to town to-day, Miss Moore! We must not lose each other. I want you to come for a week-end to stay with me. I have not a music room fifty feet long, but there is music and dancing in my house, and when you come we'll kill the fatted calf."

Cynthia saw her get into a smart motor that was waiting at the station.

When she had left the train her bright presence seemed to linger. Cynthia thought to herself, "There is no doubt about it; that's the danger Henry meant. Nobody who once loved her can care for any one else." She was more miserable than ever, and when she got to town she did not want to go to Washington in the very least. She went to her club, and felt a wild desire to see some of her own younger friends, to do something wild to prove her independence and her self-sufficiency, to prove that she was not just a green girl who could be played with, made a sport of by an older woman and an older man. She had a feeling of bravado, and she called upon a nice boy whom she knew was crazy about her and asked him to dine out with her at the club. They went together to a play, and she came back and went to bed and did not dream of Mrs. McLane or Snaith or any one at all!

Snaith had been a pleasure-loving citizen of the old globe for nearly forty years. During his habitation he had extracted from it all he could honestly in the way of pleasure, distinction; and money. Among honorable gentlemen he passed for an honorable man and a thorough man of the world. He was a passionate sportsman and a champion golfer. There was nothing he liked better in the world than out-of-door life along with a political game.

New York and Long Island knew him better than Washington, for he was a New Yorker born and bred, and had a creditable bachelor's place at Southampton, where he played golf and raised a few first-rate dogs.

Snaith played, too, a bit in political life. When the war broke out his party was not in power, and he suffered for this, and soothed his spleen by offering himself immediately for whatever a man of forty could do in a military line "over there."

On the day after the Christmas ball at Waybrook he was getting ready to run over to the Herefords when his man fetched him a little note.

"Aunt is very ill. I have gone to Washington. I will see you there at home. Cynthia."

There was no beginning and no better ending than this to his love letter, and Snaith read it over and over, but it grew neither smaller nor larger for the reading, these few lines from the ingénue who had promised the night before to marry him!

Miss Moore had written him other notes, he had sent her flowers and books and the things that a man can send to a woman. Last night she had told him it was her first engagement. This was, of course, her first attempt at love-letter writing.

He had come in at nearly dawn and had slept little, thinking of the change he had created in his life. But he thought of his newly promised wife with

delight, and her kiss welcomed him into a new life—to be young with Cynthia Moore and to love her as he had never loved before—

He had not asked her to marry him on impulse, he had wanted to marry; he had much to offer, fortune, position, and as far as men's lives go, a clean record. He wanted a fireside, he loved children and wanted them, and he wanted, moreover, to begin something new in order to obliterate something older; he wanted to obliterate a past which, although finished, needed a springtime of beauty and new love to banish it satisfactorily. Last night the words had scarcely left his lips: "When will you marry me?" when he realized that he should have waited, he had something first to tell this young girl. Cynthia seemed to him like a juvenile before a play too old for her, and he hated to say anything that must startle her youth.

If her aunt were ill and had sent for her, that explained her curt note—dashed off in haste.

If he went to town at once he could catch the two o'clock from the Pennsylvania, and would no doubt find her on the train. A long experience of women and their subtleties had taught him not to do the thing a woman has *not* asked, excepting under capital circumstances!

He had Washington called up on the phone, ordered flowers sent to her house at Fernmill, sent her a telegram saying that he would be at the Blank Hotel, asking her to send him word there when she could see him, then when he had done all this he couldn't wait to see her. "Discretion be damned!" he said to himself and motored to New York, took the first train to Washington, looked for her eagerly all through the train, and failed to find her!

He was awfully glad to get back to Washington—it was connected with Cynthia. Miss Moore seemed beauti-

fully at home here. She fitted well here. If he lost her in the ballroom because she was so typically an out-of-doors sport; he found her best in the colonial house where she lived with her dreary aunt. The dreary aunt had bored Snaith little; one of her manias was a dislike of visitors, whom she met on protest, and never appeared at all when she could escape.

Cynthia's home had the greatest charm for Snaith, and in the atmosphere of the fine old place, in its big rooms, before its autumn and early winter fires, he had done his best to forget a certain silvery-gray house, colonial as well, and full of its individual attraction, a little house that shone like a mother-of-pearl button on the splendid coat of a wealthy countryside.

Snaith liked women enormously, but he was not a *chercheur d'émotions*—not a seeker after sensations in the least degree, and if his name had been very much coupled with a special lady it had never been coupled with the name of any one else. He had loved her long and sincerely, and she was the reason that he had not married.

In Washington the time did not hang on his hands. He went to the foreign office, then he went to his hotel and found no word from Cynthia. He did not telephone to the homestead for the reason that one of Miss Cynthia Moore the First's, manias was, that she wouldn't have a telephone in the house! Next morning he took a taxi and motored to Fernmill, from there Cynthia and he walked to the golf links usually.

The windows of the old house, bright and cheerful, suggested nothing of anxious watching or serious illness. The midwinter light, subdued and beautiful, wrapped the house gently around. There was no snow or north wind to make it cheerless, and the grass on the lawns was green. There was a colonial knocker on the door, and he lifted it.

It was another of Miss Cynthia Moore the First's, particularities, there was not a bell in the house!

All the way down on the train he had been telling himself two things—that it would be enormously good to see Cynthia, and that he must tell her everything before he would have the right to take her in his arms again.

The door was opened by Miss Cynthia Moore herself, that is Miss Cynthia Moore the First, the dreary aunt. The sight of her whom he had supposed to be dying was a shock. He had not supposed to find her on active duty, such as the opening of front doors! Miss Moore's spectacles were high on her forehead.

"Wipe your feet on the mat," she said severely, "and go round to the kitchen door. Eat all you like in the kitchen, but don't take anything away."

Here her glasses slipped to her nose and she saw he was a gentleman.

"Dear me!" she caroled in a semi-cracked voice, "Cynthia's friend, Mr. Snake. Come in, come in, if you like?"

She made him something half between a hop and a curtsy, and a colored maid came up behind with a silver card tray in her hands.

"My niece is down on Long Island," said Miss Moore.

He found himself halfway between a very uncordial mistress and a smiling colored girl to whom he had already given many tips.

"Miss Cynthia certainly am gone to Miss Patricia's Christmas ball," said the colored maid and opened one of the drawing-room doors, as Miss Cynthia Moore the First, calmly and ungraciously, with no other word, turned her back and began to go upstairs.

"He can go to the drawing-room," she said over her shoulder, "if he likes, but why should he when there is no one here I don't know!"

She went determinedly up the stairs.

He could see that Cynthia's aunt was in perfect health!

Snaith said so to Crissie in the little, yellow drawing-room, where the fireplace seemed to be the biggest thing in it, almost out of proportion with its smallness and delicateness. The hangings here were warm yellow and the furniture had been there since Lafayette and De Ségur had talked at its center table with General Washington. Snaith liked it better than the more courtly library beyond, which offered less intimacy to two people making love before a fire.

"Miss Cynthia certainly will be sorry, I don't 'spect her back for ten days."

She smiled at him so heartily, and her soft Southern voice was so affectionate, that Snaith might have supposed that the negress extended him an invitation to wait the ten days if he liked in the lovely little room.

"Miss Moore told me that she was coming home; there will be some message from her. I shall smoke for a few minutes if you don't mind, then if Miss Moore doesn't come I'll walk on to the links and have a game."

Crissie left him. He couldn't fix Cynthia's picture here. All the way down from New York he had been thinking out what he should tell her, and as he shaped and modeled his story, the woman who had been so intensely part of his life for many years took possession of him again, vitally in flesh and blood, and suggested to him their mutual past, and how to tell it.

He had fallen in love with Mary McLane ten years ago, when she had fallen in love with him with the whole heart of her. She was married to a pitiful drunkard, who loved her as no man could fail to do who knew her, and she was pitieous of him and would neither divorce him nor leave him, and she and Snaith had made what they could out of love. She had held him

firm and fast, kept him happy and attached. Before the breaking out of the war he had come over to Paris to run a horse of his for the Grand Prix, and they had found out that they did not love each other as much as they thought; that they could get on without each other, and Snaith made up his mind to break away forever and make himself a fireside and a home. He was perfectly free and she was perfectly captive, still bound to a drunkard who passed his life in a cure for delirium tremens.

This, and all it meant; a past perfectly happy until it grew too incomplete, he brought with him into the intimacy of Cynthia Moore's little yellow drawing-room, and as he stood, thinking, with his back to the fire, smoking, Mary McLane seemed to come and stand. He had thought so much more about her than he had let himself think for a long time; he could not banish her. She was dressed in the ball dress of the night before; a black dress with silver, scarcely more than a veil of gauze, and it was she who looked down at the floor as he had done, silent, beautiful, and appealing.

Henry Snaith smoked and mused and the big fire crackled behind his back. Through the window in front of him he could see the road in the distance where his taxi waited outside. At the gate of the house he saw presently another taxi drive up and Cynthia Moore get out of it and come along, followed by the man who carried her valise.

"I have never told a real lie—I mean a serious lie before, and I hate them. I can't bear people who tell lies and I can't forgive it. I don't mean to say that I have not said to the maid I was not at home or something like that. My aunt was not ill and I was not sent for to Waybrook."

Saying this the pale and tired Cynthia came into the little drawing-room with-

out any other greeting to Smith, as if she had expected to find him just where he was standing before the chimney!

"I know," said Snaith, "your aunt is in wonderful health and spirit."

Between the door and the chimney place Cynthia waited as if she did not want to advance, as though she did not trust him, and the clear, dark eyes whose frankness he knew so well rested reproachfully upon him. There was an expression of youth startled in her; for the first time he saw in her something that drew back from him and repulsed him. He was a sportsman, and it made him think of a young animal that springs back when the falling branches disturb him in his perfect security. She was not the same girl that he left in the ballroom two nights before.

"Come," he said, "and sit down with me as you used to do before we went to Waybrook."

Cynthia was at home, he was the guest, she had asked him to come, she wanted him to be there, so she took a chair facing him as she had done countless times when they had come in here together after walking or golf to talk things over and continue their sentimental friendship.

She went on gloomily, "When a person tells you a lie once you never feel the same toward her again, you couldn't."

"I did not call it a lie on your part," said Snaith, "I looked at it as an invitation or a summons. Since you make a confession, Cynthia, it is up to me to do the same! My dear girl I am here for that."

He saw her wince. The last hope she had disappeared here. Then he *had* something to confess! And as she heard these words she realized how foolishly she had been believing that she had been mistaken. She was terribly tired—terribly unnerved and afraid she would cry. She took off her gloves and

dropped them by the side of her chair, took off her hatpin and sent her hat to join the gloves, and sat patiently ready to look at life with him, since it must be he who would show it to her. Snaith leaned over toward her.

"I asked you to marry me the other night because I couldn't help it. Is it a crime?"

"No, if you had the right to ask."

She liked the way he began.

"No, if you have the right it's not a crime."

"What makes a man have the right to ask a woman whom he loves to marry him?"

"He should be free."

He observed her intently, he could not bear to startle her, but Cynthia had not come here to be spared the truth.

"I ought to have told you long before, I know, but there were many reasons why I did not."

And Snaith told her everything from the beginning to the end of his life history with Mary McLane. He kept nothing back as far as he could tell it in justice to the other woman. He was perfectly frank and perfectly sincere and Cynthia knew it.

"You see I am twelve years older than you, Cynthia. I was living a man's life when you were going to school. I did not know you were in the world, or I should have waited for you, of course. I am going to let all my past go, and I just concentrate on the five years of my life with Mary."

He heard her breath.

"Five years!"

"Yes, five years during which I just loved one woman and she loved me."

Here Cynthia put out her hand.

"What's the use of going on! If it was for five years it ought to have been forever! How *could* one pick up anything else again? You *couldn't* put such a thing out of your life!"

"I did not put it out of my life, it went out of our lives."

His voice was so honest and the look that he fixed on her was so confident, he seemed so thoroughly to belong to her, to be apart from any other life, that she listened.

"Won't you let me tell it my own way, Cynthia, and when I have done you will answer?"

He began at the time when he had first seen Mary McLane at Newport with her wretched husband and how he had met her first at dinner and pitied her as she went away with a man who almost reeled as he walked.

He made a picture of the devoted and unhappy woman and of their slowly growing intimacy; he made the friendship which stood by her in moments of despair and horror a comprehensible, even a beautiful thing. He made her seem adorable in her refusal to divorce her weak, inebriate husband. He told Cynthia that when Mary McLane had married, her husband was very rich and she was very poor, and that when he gambled away his fortune she supported him generously with her writing, and that in spite of the burden he was, and the horror he was, she wouldn't desert him, although she knew that as soon as she was divorced, Snaith would marry her.

The girl, who was hanging on his words, exclaimed:

"It was *fine* of her, simply great! I love her for it."

And she caught herself up and said:

"How can you think that I believe you can forget a thing like that?"

"The time came when we both ceased to remember."

Then Snaith told her, handling the subject with delicacy, something of their mutual happiness together, something of the companionship that they made out of what was left her of life, and Cynthia listened as well as she could. He told Cynthia how he had helped her to settle her little house on Long Island, which she had bought and paid

for with her own earnings, that she had placed her husband in an asylum near her, that she went to see him daily and took him fruits and flowers, and daily took him out in her little car, as all Long Island knew. She couldn't have him at home because one of his manias was that he wanted to kill her in the night.

"Poor woman!" murmured Cynthia and added, "but she had *you*."

Snaith bowed his head. "She felt that she had right to the little of life that was left her, and she would have died if it had not been for our friendship."

Again Cynthia half extended her hand, as though she asked him not to try to make her believe what was not true.

"How can you think that I believe that you can break this and give it up?"

Snaith paused. He saw in Cynthia's eyes, love for her rival, a singularly unselfish love.

"You are too fine for words! Too splendid!" and he saw the color flashed out that he loved to see on her cheeks.

"When the war broke out and I was going to France, the time had simply come for us to part forever." He stopped a moment, looking down at the floor, as Cynthia had seen him at Waybrook when Mrs. McLane had been talking to him in the hallway downstairs. She said gently.

"I am listening."

"I wonder if I can make you understand!"

Cynthia's face was certainly very understanding, swept clean of any small, ugly jealousy, as clean as a child's in its freedom from everything but fine feelings and confidence.

"Try," she said, "I'll do my best, it is new to me, all of it."

"We simply couldn't either of us go on."

"Why?" she asked.

"It had ceased to be perfect happiness for us, and both made big demands

on life; we were not happy any more, as it was."

The girl repeated the words "*as it was?*"

"A secret thing, homeless, and incomplete."

"Ah!" said Cynthia Moore slowly, "I think I understand. You both wanted a home—together."

"Yes!" said Snaith, "that was it. We both wanted a home together, or else to be perfectly free."

She looked away from him, out of the little window with its small panes to the lawn, still fresh and green in December, and where the morning sunlight poured. With the word "home," the years in the old colonial house and what home meant seemed realer to her than it had ever seemed—more precious and deeper. Her capacity for feeling and understanding, the depths in her which made her love the best and want the best, made it possible for this clean-minded young girl to grasp the sadness and the beauty of the story of the worldly man who had lived only half a life of love, and found it fail him at the last.

"I think perhaps I felt the need more than Mary did."

"But you both had homes," said Cynthia, remembering Snaith's bachelor's house at Southampton and the little gray home in the west.

Snaith said, "To certain temperaments home is only home with indispensable objects in it." Looking at Cynthia he said, "I mean with a wife and children." He saw her blush vividly.

"I know what you would like to say," he added, "that since Mrs. McLane was cut off from having this why should I be the one to have everything and she nothing? However that may be, we both felt alike and at the same time. We simply couldn't go on as it was, we couldn't—I think she is perfectly happy now," said Snaith frankly.

"Is she?" said Cynthia. "Well you

know better than I do, but a life with a drunken husband to drive through town every day is not my ideal of happiness!"

"She loves her work," said Snaith, "and she is very clever and very much sought after. When you saw her at Patricia's ball she did not look like an unhappy woman, did she?"

"She looked lovely," said Miss Moore, "and I saw her yesterday, and she looked lovelier still."

Snaith repeated, "*You saw her yesterday.*"

"Yes, we came in from Waybrook together."

He looked surprised, but said nothing more about it.

"I have told you everything. I should have told you long ago."

She left her chair and went over to the window and stayed there, looking out on the green lawn, and from the fireplace Snaith said:

"I am not so in love with you that I can't appreciate that this is a shock. It will take time to get over it."

He came over to her.

"My chief has asked me to go to England on a mission. I sail to-morrow, and I will be away several months."

She turned round in great surprise.

"You know," he said, "that I love you, and I want you to be my wife and help me to build the home I have been longing for, for such a long time! Will you answer me now, or would you rather give me my answer when I come back?"

The memory of the Christmas ball, when she had said she would marry him and he had kissed her, pushed the other memories away.

Snaith said, "I have told you a story of real love for a woman I respect, whom I should have married gladly if she had been free. I have no excuses or regrets. I am free and I love you. Will you marry me?"

Tears had come into her eyes. She

had so few reasons for tears and cried so rarely she scarcely knew what to do with tears! Everything that he said drew her to him more sincerely, she felt the power of this lifelong friendship which had only stopped short when the ideal could not be realized. "*We could not go on.*" She believed him entirely free and, as he kissed her over and over again, the feeling of being swung up to the stars and set apart by love in a world full of lovers made her forget all else.

"If I had to give you my answer to-day, I should say yes, but I don't say yes. I don't want to. You are going to England to-morrow, I'll tell you when you come back."

Snaith cried, "Never! You will say yes now. You don't suppose that I am going to let you go!"

"You must," she said.

"Then don't you love me?"

And in all her innocence, in all her ignorance of life, she said: "Of course, I do."

"Don't you believe I love you?"

She said, "Yes!"

"Why don't you want to give me my answer now?"

"Please let it be just as I say, won't you?"

"I shall write you and you will write me and cable?"

Cynthia shook her head, "Not a single word."

"What do you mean?"

She was very young, but she was old enough to have her way, and she knew as far as she went what she wanted.

"I think we——"

"I want to think this over. I want to be perfectly sure, and, if you trust me, and I think you do, you will go away without writing, and you will not ask me to write you."

"It is very hard—very hard indeed."

Cynthia said nothing, and he knew what her silence meant.

"I want you to promise me," said Cynthia, "to keep your word."

Snaith gave her that promise, knowing that the time would pass, and that he would be back again, and that he would claim her again. Here Crissie pushed the door open and came in with an enormously long flower box, the flowers Snaith had ordered from Southampton over the telephone the day before! By reason of an error they had only been sent out to Fernmill to-day.

"You see," said Snaith, "I sent flowers."

And Cynthia laughed, the nervous tension and the strain broken.

"Were they for aunt Cynthia's funeral or to celebrate a broken engagement?"

The box overflowed with lilac and sweet peas, Snaith said.

"Let them speak to you of a country wedding here, Cynthia, in the spring."

There was nothing in the dreary day to cheer a lonely woman whose horizon in spite of many friends had narrowed to herself and her inebriate husband.

Mrs. McLane had every reason to be absorbed in this poor thing just now, for during the last fortnight he had given her very grave anxieties indeed, once or twice she had even been called over to the asylum, where he was, to see him for the last time. But the last time had not come yet. There had been a period in her life when McLane's death would have solved her problem. It would have simply meant that she would have been a happy woman married to a man she loved. It would mean now that she would find herself alone with a responsibility and a charge removed indeed, but there was nothing to fill her empty hands.

Her guests called her house the "Little Gray Home in the West"—but she wondered why. She thought it was more like a wayside station, where people arrived with trunks and valises and

went off again by motor and train, leaving behind them little trace, save tips to the servants, the usual uninteresting letters of thanks. She was sitting in her little smoking room before her writing table looking over the notes of the people who had spent the last week-end with her and planning a new party. She had intended asking Cynthia Moore to her next week-end party, but something she had heard lately had made her desire not to do so. Her last guests were a number of people from Washington, and they had told her things.

She was in her smoking room; it had many memories, she wrote her books here under the portrait of a man in hunting clothes, a portrait painted by one of the good people and thoroughly satisfying for some one who was fond of the sitter. Looking at it now she thought: "Some day I shall have to give it to his wife."

The man in the portrait held a bird dog between his knees, and both man and dog were looking straight out of the picture at Mrs. McLane, where she sat before her big, writing table. The Waybrook meet had gone beyond her house and across the country out of view on a paper chase. It was one of the pretty things about her house, that one could see the hunts finely from the windows when one was not riding. She lit a cigarette and began to think, and then afraid to let herself dream, knowing how dangerous it was, picked up a book and tried to read. The man whose portrait hung over the table had given her the book, the big table on which she worked had been made under his direction, just the height she liked. She had planned with him the arrangement of her room with its low ceiling, with its small westward windows. One of the cruel things about it all was the stamp such a long friendship leaves. The man could go, and had gone, but he had not taken with him all memories.

She said to herself, "Of course I can't

keep that portrait, I ought to have sent it away long ago. I suppose now I shall have to give it to this girl."

She was growing more desperately lonely every day of her life, even the perfect little week-end parties where every one had such an unlimitedly good time were tasteless to her. As long as Henry had not married she had been able to bear existence with a vague hope that perhaps, by some miracle, they might yet meet again. What she had heard from Washington was making her suffer cruelly. It was the inevitable end. A soft nose pushed aside the curtain which fell between the study and the winter garden and a white and black dog, thin and graceful, with sympathetic eyes and an understanding heart, came up to the woman in the chair who was not reading and laid his long head across her knee, looking up at her with untold goodness and beauty in his eyes. She put her hand gently on his head, and the tears came to her eyes, sincere tears, the kind that Irish natures know how to shed—the kind that splash down. They broke the spell.

"How stupid I am! There is nothing so dreary as a woman who cries when there is no one to wipe her tears away!"

She heard the horn of the Waybrook meet, and went to the window to see what she could of dogs and hunters, and what she saw was a group of people coming 'cross fields leading a horse and carrying something in their midst. She had seen many accidents from these windows, and considered herself an ambulance station and had all the supplies. The group directed itself toward her place, and she caught up a raincoat and a soft hat in the hall and rushed down to the gate. She was there to open it and let them through, carrying a girl. Nolly Rolland said:

"It is Cynthia Moore. She came a nasty cropper by the brook—I guess we'll have to fetch her in to you, Mrs.

McLane, until we can get a car and a doctor."

And like this they carried little Cynthia into the small gray house, whose sloping roof covered the windows like a discreet blinder, and shut her under it with her rival for four long weeks' time!

From the time when Miss Moore had been put unconscious in Mrs. McLane's own bedroom until the day when fully dressed in the sun parlor, able to take her first steps, she was convalescent, Mrs. McLane had nursed her as a mother or a sister would.

The Herefords and Rollands were all going out West on a private car, and Miss Moore was to have been one of them, but on the night of the accident Mrs. McLane said to Mrs. Hereford, down in her small study, under the eyes of Snaith:

"Oh! go West by all means! It is nothing but a nasty strain, and the doctor says that if she walks she may have spinal trouble, but she shan't walk. I give you my word of honor I'll hand her over fit as a fiddle in a few weeks! You can trust me!"

Mrs. Hereford knew that she could trust her neighbor, for Mrs. McLane had the reputation of being a person to be trusted.

"You saw how awfully cut up she was, my dear, at the idea of spoiling your California trip, and it would be terribly bad for her—so please go."

"She is such a lonely little thing," Mrs. Hereford had said, "with only that maniacal, dreary old aunt."

"I shan't send for her!" laughed Mrs. McLane. "Don't be afraid! I hold myself equal to a crazy aunt, anyway!"

The two women were good friends. Mrs. Hereford was bitterly sorry for Mary McLane; only that very morning she had passed her on her way to the asylum.

"How is your husband, my dear?" she asked frankly.

Mrs. McLane's face clouded.

"He is very ill and some days pass when I can't see him at all. This gives me some freedom."

Under the low roof of the little, gray house Cynthia did not feel that she was an interloper, and she wondered if perhaps her generous hostess had known she was going to marry this Spring, the generous hostess would run away and leave her to the care of trained nurses and doctors.

Snaith had kept his promise, he never wrote to her, he never cabled; there had not been any interchange between them since the day he had left her in Washington. So nothing came from Snaith to the little, gray house, for Mrs. McLane and he had ceased to correspond.

During Cynthia's illness and convalescence the two women had made a fast and close friendship. Although Cynthia did not know it, her love for Mary McLane was fast becoming a more important thing in her feeling than the man whom she had half promised to marry.

The sun parlor, bright with its green wicker furniture and the sunlight of an early spring day, opened out from the smoking room. Cynthia lay on her chaise longue, her hands above her head, waiting for Mary to come home from her morning visit to her husband. The windows were thrown open, and over Mary's pots of hyacinth and mignonette in the window box came the cool air from outside, sweet with earthly smell. Mary's dog, sleepily awake, his head on his paws, lay outstretched in the sunlight, passing the time until his mistress should return.

"He is not a bit of a woman's dog," Cynthia had said to her hostess, "where did you get him, Mary?"

And Mrs. McLane had returned, "I won him on a wager long ago."

Cynthia had found it hard to think clearly with Mary so close to her, but Henry Snaith was returning to the United States next week, and would be

in Southampton. She must give him his answer now, she could not delay. She lay, her hands above her head, her cheeks flushed. The four weeks of illness had somewhat shattered her cool nerve. She threw off the light, silk cover and got up. "I believe I can walk alone," she thought, "and I am going to try."

She put her hand on the back of a chair here and there. She crossed the winter garden into the next room. In front of Mary's table she sank down in the comfortable chair and raised her eyes triumphantly to meet Henry Snaith's eyes. The portrait was a shock—a real shock! Henry Snaith, wonderfully lifelike, looked out of the picture with an expression she had never seen on his face. Mrs. McLane had often sat with him while he had posed for this picture, and Cynthia saw how he had thanked her for sitting there with him and for many other things, for her love and for herself. She looked a long time into the eyes of the man in the picture. Now, at last, like this, she could think.

She and Mary had talked about many things, books and sports; but of love and passion they had said nothing at all. Cynthia had not known how to begin, and Mrs. McLane did not want to pause before this young girl as a disillusioned misanthrope. Now Cynthia could formulate. She seemed to see clearly what she wanted to do, what she intended to do. She said softly aloud in her young honest voice:

"Here! That's the way to look at some one you want to spend your life with—that's the way Mary makes you look. I couldn't take you from her for anything in the world!"

She took a sheet of paper and an envelope and, with a glance half humorous and half on the edge of tears, she wrote to Henry Snaith, sitting at Mary's desk, and addressed it to his house at Southampton. She found a stamp and

put it on the letter, and she sat holding it in her hand when her hostess, heralded by the dog, came in to her, and found her there.

"Cynthia, you walked alone! Why didn't you wait for me? You walked alone!"

"Which proves that I am grown up then, doesn't it, Mary?"

Mary McLane was an impulsive Irishwoman. She sat down by Cynthia's side and put her arms round her and her cheek close to Cynthia's.

"I have stayed out all the morning because I wanted to stay away from you to think clearly. We have grown close friends since you have been here, and yet you have not said a word about the biggest thing of your life—about the only thing you have been thinking of, my dear."

Cynthia understood that the moment had come, and that it was Mary McLane's by right. Mrs. McLane moved away a bit, sank on her knees by Cynthia's chair and, taking her hands, looked up at the young girl out of her fine Irish eyes.

"The week they brought you in here some people from Washington told me that you had broken your engagement to Henry Snaith on account of me. Please!" said Mary McLane, "I want to speak first, my dear, because it was the biggest thing in my life for five years, because I want you to marry Henry. He is the finest man I ever knew and I love you both. Wait"—she said—"please wait!"

And, as down in her own home in Washington, Snaith had told her everything from beginning to end, Mary did the same here, and Cynthia, who had seen the woman through the man's story, now saw Snaith through Mary's eyes.

Still as Cynthia did not speak, but sat looking down at the envelope whose address was headed from Mary's, Mary left her and went into the winter gar-

den, and her dog followed her. For a few moments she sat on Cynthia's chaise longue, her hands clasped on her lap. Henry had loved her hands, always before leaving her he used to cover them with kisses. How many times he had asked her to take off her wedding ring for days and days! Now she turned it round, rushing back to those old days in her thoughts and in her desire. She hardly heard Cynthia come in. Cynthia sat down by her side and lightly lay the letter across Mary McLane's hands, the address visible.

"Before you came in, Mary, I had made up my mind."

Cynthia saw a look of relief across the other woman's face.

"Are you perfectly sure, my darling?"

Cynthia put her arms round Mary's neck and kissed her.

A few weeks later, when the spring-time odors were even more delicious and all the windows of the little, gray house were opened to the west on an April morning, Mrs. McLane sat in her study trying to write a new story.

She was forcing herself to write—trying to begin again—telling herself that for every reason in the world she must.

She was in black, the inevitable had happened. Now she had nothing in the world with which to fill her time and her hands, but this little task of making her living by her pen. Scattered over her table were scribbled sheets of paper on which she had begun in vain! At her feet, still as always when he knew that he must be, lay her dog, and Henry Snaith from the portrait looked down at her as though he told her to begin again, but between the sentences she paused and waited, waited and paused. Motors went by, but they did not disturb her, she was far enough back not to be disturbed by their rumor, the faint voice of life and society on

its active way. She loved life and people, she loved to think life was going on—and she had no taste for solitude!

As she sat busy with her thoughts and an unwilling pencil between her fingers, Spot suddenly sprang up and gave the loud cry of welcome that he kept especially for his best beloveds of whom, in his life, there had only been two! Then he dashed out of the smok-

ing room, knocking a small table and a big bowl of hyacinths, with a crash, to the floor. Mary McLane sprang up, too, but followed him no farther than the smoking-room door, where she waited with the cry in her heart only best beloveds waken. She stood there as Snaith came across the winter garden with Spot leaping all over him trying to reach his face.



THE CHRISTMAS STAR

SO brief a time the things of beauty bide,
The bluebird's love notes tossed upon the morn,
Rose leaves that drift adown June's crimson tide,
And the soft green that crinkles the young corn.

The aura of the wheat that is of gold,
And the plum's purple cheek the wild bee stings,
Deep-bosomed orchards that rich treasures hold,
The sharp crescendo that the cricket sings.

The woodbine's damask on the lane's long wall,
Hinting of sunset as the days grow brief;
And the wood thrush's far retreating call,
Crying a farewell to the last red leaf.

These pass, and yet the spirit's inner eyes
Are more than by their vanishing sufficed;
Seeing in dreams above the hills arise
The radiant star, that marked the birth of Christ.
CLINTON SCOLLARD.



More Super-Women

By Anice Terhune

Mary Philipse:

The Super-Woman Whom
Washington Loved

Nay, never ask this week, fair lord,
Where they are gone, nor yet this year,
Except with this for an overword—
But where are the snows of yesteryear?
—*Ballad of Dead Ladies.*

THERE were great preparations on foot in the Philipse family.

Mary, the very beautiful and accomplished daughter of the house, was about to start on a long journey.

In 1756, traveling was a serious business. The road from Philipse Manor House, in the heart of what is now Yonkers, down the river to New York City led through a wilderness which suggested all sorts of adventure.

Mary was on tiptoe with excitement. Servants rushed from one room to another packing haircloth trunks and bonnet boxes with all the loveliest and daintiest of their young mistress' brocades and chiffons. The four horses which were to draw the great family coach were rubbed down till they shone like satin. The silver-mounted harness was polished till it reflected the horses' silken skins. The liveries of the out-riders were fresh and gay.

As for Mary herself—she donned her most becoming bonnet and cloak, looked at herself critically in her oval mirror, and stuck a small black patch of court-plaster on her smooth cheek to enhance its rose-leaf color. Then she kissed her family good-by with much the same feeling that we have to-day when we

take a steamship for Europe. This done, she tripped up the steps of the coach, slipped her toes into the warm foot muff on the floor, let herself be carefully bundled in luxurious traveling robes, and with a gay farewell wave the cavalcade was off.

Mary was a famous beauty, the belle of the surrounding country. She had bright, dark eyes and dusky hair, a face that was oval, but that ended in a firm little jaw which was a key to her character. All her biographers declared that her figure was "superb." She was haughty, as befitted the daughter of a man who owned all the land between Spuyten Duyvil and the Croton River; but in spite of her imperious manner, her warm and kindly heart carried an irresistible charm.

Her father, Frederick Philipse, was the grandson of a Dutch trader who became tremendously wealthy. He owned many thousands of acres of woodland, mountain, hillside, and rich meadows. He built the house where, long years later, his granddaughter, little Mary, was born, and called it Philipse Manor, which name it bears to-day. He stocked his parks with tame deer, his gardens with rare bulbs, seeds, and ornamental shade trees. These he imported from England and the Continent. To his simple neighbors, the place was a veritable fairland.

He was called "The Dutch Million-

aire." As far as is actually known, his prosperity came to him honestly, through his own cleverness and business acumen; but his name was smirched by a strong suspicion that he was mixed up with Captain Kidd—and that he had greatly enriched himself by this pirate connection. However that may be, the fortune he left was enjoyed to the full by his descendents, who lived like feudal lords.

Mary's inherited wealth, as well as her own wonderful charm, made her a belle wherever she went. At the time of her famous journey to New York, she had already received ardent love vows and proffers of marriage from all the best "catches" in the surrounding country. But, as yet, though she was twenty-six, her heart was quite untouched.

Meanwhile, the jingling chariot had been making good time. It had passed through the forest and farm land where Fourteenth Street now is and skirted around Collect Pond, with its gay parties of young people skating. The Tombs Prison and the Criminal Courts Building now stand where the pond used to be, by the way.

South of Wall Street, the coach lumbered into fashionable New York—a little bunch of queer, twisted streets, unpaved for the most part, and with droves of pigs rooting in the roadways; but a brilliant metropolis to the folk of 1756. At that time, bathrooms and furnaces had not been invented. Bedrooms were freezing cold in winter; there were no such things as ice boxes in summer. "There were neither matches, omnibuses, mustaches, nor latchkeys."

In one of the finest houses lived Colonel Beverley Robinson and his wife, Susan, Mary's sister. Great preparations had been made for the visit of the young super-woman; and within a short time after the footman had assisted her down the coach steps and

up those of the Robinson mansion, Mary's bright eyes had begun to work mischief among the youths who flocked in droves to the house.

And right here is where Mary missed the greatest opportunity of her life—the chance to come down through the historic ages, not as "Mary Philipse, colonial belle and super-woman," but side by side with the great central figure of American history, Washington—as The Mother of Her Country!

Alas! Second sight was not among Mary's many gifts, so when she met the fine-looking, raw-boned giant from Virginia, he was Colonel George Washington to her, and nothing more.

With Washington, it was a case of love at first sight. He had "ever an eye for a fine woman," says his biographer. Gallant, fearless soldier as he was, and seemingly proof against mortal weapons, he was slain by the first glance from Mary's dark eyes—the first smile from her roguish mouth. Then and there, he laid siege to the haughty beauty's heart. According to the story in the Philipse family, he begged her to marry him after he had known her only five days.

Why Mary did not return his love must forever remain a mystery. Certainly he was enough to cause any woman—even a super-woman—to lose her heart. He was monstrous good to look upon. He was twenty-four. His fame was just dawning. He had won his first bright laurels at Great Meadows and Monongahela. He was aide-camp to General Braddock. He was, besides, a rich Virginia planter, and a good match for any girl, be she ever so much a belle!

Washington was on his way to see Governor Shirley, at Boston, and stopped in New York to visit his old friend, Beverley Robinson. He had traveled north on horseback in more splendor than even Mary herself had traveled south. His uniform of buff

and blue, with white-and-scarlet cloak, marvelously became him. His sword knot was of red and gold. Washington was a man of fashion and thought nothing of spending four hundred and seventy-five dollars on his tailor and four hundred and seventy dollars on silver lace. "His furniture," writes a chronicler, "was of the best make. It was trimmed with livery lace and carried the Washington arms on the housings."

He loved and understood horses, and his mount was the finest. Two aids, in buff and blue, accompanied him, and behind rode his servants, in the Washington colors of red and white, with silver-laced hats.

And, by the way, though we have always been told that our American flag took its colors from the Washington coat of arms, Washington himself explained its symbolism thus: "The stars we take from heaven. The red of England we separate by the white stripes of liberty."

As the future Father of His Country rode north, every door flew open to him. Every hostess was delighted to welcome him; every man of influence was anxious to do him honor. He was wine and dined and fêted till the wonder is that his head was not completely turned by all this adulation. It remained for Mary Philipse to turn his head in quite another way—as we have seen.

Though urgent business called Washington to Boston, he could not bear the thought of leaving Mary, even for a short time. He lingered on at the Robinsons as long as he dared, for the sake of being near Mary. He made love to her at every opportunity. But it availed him nothing. She accepted his attentions as she did those of a host of others—as her just due. Yet her manners were so winning, she was altogether so adorable, that Washington found it impossible to give up hope.

When, at last, he had to go, the love-

lorn youth felt that he was leaving all his happiness behind him. As he jumped on his horse preparatory to setting out, he begged his friend, Joseph Chew, to keep a watchful eye on "Polly," as he called her, and to let him know how things went with the winsome super-woman. Especially, he yearned to be told of his rivals—and whether she showed symptoms of favoring one more than another. This the faithful Chew promised to do. And he kept his word.

As it turned out, Mary's love affairs proved entertaining watching. There was plenty for Chew to write about. The girl became the most sought-after damsel in all the city, which then was, literally, "little old New York." She refused offer after offer, couched in all the fervid and flowery language of those fervid and flowery days. Rich men, handsome men, young men, and old, flung themselves on their satin or velvet knees before the proud beauty. They really did fling themselves on their knees, you know, in those days! A proposal was considered hardly worth listening to, unless it was delivered in this humble, but most flattering way.

Among others who wore holes in the carpet at Mary's feet was young Roger Morris. He had borne arms under Braddock and fought side by side with Washington at the fateful battle of Monongahela. Now he was fighting against the Virginian for Mary's love.

That Morris made the most of Washington's absence is shown in the anxious tone of a letter Chew wrote his friend while the colonel was in Philadelphia.

"As to the latter part of your letter," he writes, "I have often had the pleasure of breakfasting with the charming Polly. Roger Morris is much there—don't be startled—but not always. You know he is a ladies' man—always has something to say.

"The town talks of it as a settled and

sure affair. How can you be excused to continue so long at Philadelphia? I think, if I were you, I should make a kind of flying march, if it were only to see whether the works were sufficient to withstand a vigorous attack! You, a soldier and a lover!

"I intend to set out for New York again to-morrow, where I will not be wanting to let Mistress Polly know the sincere regard a friend of mine has for her; and I am sure if she had my eyes to see through, she would prefer him to all others!"

Washington's fiery energy was hidden under a calm and unruffled exterior. In those early days of his greatness, his friends did not always give him credit for his depth of character. But he was a soldier first and a lover when there was time! His heart was with Mary Philipse; his duty was with his country. So, while he was about his country's business, Roger Morris stole a march on him with the fascinating Polly.

When Washington was able to return to the fray, his rival was in full possession of the citadel. Thus Mary Philipse passed out of his life, little dreaming that she had brushed against the mantle of immortality. Had she so much as raised one white finger toward it, the mantle would have fallen upon her own fair shoulders forever.

In 1758 Mary and Roger were married. It was a gorgeous wedding. The most brilliant of the year. All of fashionable New York journeyed out to Philipse Manor to take part in the splendid festivities.

"The bride was a woman of great beauty, as well as force of will," says a seventeenth century writer. "If she had married Washington, some think she would have made him a royalist."

However that may be, Mary was a very happy bride and more than contented with her choice of a husband.

Soon afterward, Morris built a beau-

tiful home for her on Harlem Heights. Later, by one of the tricks fate loves to play, the place came to be known as Fort Washington. You shall learn why as the story goes on. Still later—long after Mary's laugh had ceased to echo through the halls of her much-loved home, another super-woman took up her residence there. She was Madame Jumel, who married Aaron Burr. The house has been known ever since as the Jumel Mansion.

Here, for eighteen happy years, Mary Morris held gay court. During that time, her home was the pivot around which revolved the social world of the New York colony.

Then the Revolutionary War broke. The colonies wrenched themselves away from mother England. There was social as well as military upheaval. A sharp, impassable line was drawn between Tories and patriots. Friendships of a lifetime were smashed in a moment.

The Morrisses were Royalists. In 1776 they were driven from their home by the oncoming American army. General Washington was at the head of that army. His former sweetheart, Mary Morris, fled to "Beverley," her sister's beautiful summer home on the Hudson.

Washington established the army on Harlem Heights, and took up his own headquarters in Mary's deserted house. He found memories of her everywhere, despite the grimness of war and the fact that he and she were on opposite sides of the struggle for liberty. It was not by accident that he chose Philipse Manor for his headquarters. And, later, he passed several nights in a log hut near Lake Mahopac, because it had belonged to Mary.

Colonel Beverley Robinson held a commission in the royal army and sympathized with England, heart and soul. His wife sided with her husband. Ere the war had gone on long, they had to leave Beverley.

Many treason plots, during the Revolution, were hatched under that hospitable roof. It was there that Benedict Arnold and his super-woman wife, Peggy Shippen, were living when Arnold betrayed his country and took boat to the British lines. It was there that Major André was brought just after his arrest.

Strange to say, Beverley's historic roof sheltered, at one time or another, three super-women, all close friends of Washington. They were Mary Morris, Peggy Shippen, and Madame Jumel. Like Washington, Madame Jumel seems to have found a strange attraction in the paths once trod by Mary.

Meanwhile, Mary herself was suspected of having much more than a passive interest in the English side of the war. She and her sister were presently accused as spies, arrested, and thrown into prison.

The huge estates of the Morris, Philipse, and Robinson families were confiscated by the United States government. In time, portions of them were returned to their descendants.

Years later, John Jacob Astor bought the Philipse Manor tract for one hundred thousand dollars, and sold it to New York City for five times that sum.

Mary and her husband, stanch Royalists to the end, drifted to England,

where they made their home until Morris died. Mary outlived him by thirty-one years. She died in 1825, at the great age of ninety-five. Both were buried in their beloved England—in York.

But through all the years of separation Washington never quite forgot Mary. Though he loved or admired a score of women in turn, though he was most happy in his own marriage, Washington still kept Mary's memory, like a faint sprig of rosemary, in his heart.

After many busy, triumphant, vital years, he resolved to make one last pilgrimage to her shrine.

So, on a beautiful, sunshiny day, he took Lady Washington's two grandchildren—he had no children of his own—for a picnic.

The place he chose for the little party was Mary Philipse's old home. The house was tenanted by strangers; so the picnickers spread their luncheon on the grass under the trees.

To the children it was just a merry party, with grandpapa as host.

And Washington?

Leaning against a tree trunk, he gazed far up into the leafy roof over his head. The eyes that had pierced the future for his country became dreamy. Behind the soft green shadows he saw only the past—and Mary.



MY SONGS

I SANG my songs for you alone,
But all the others heard
And thought that I had sung for them
Each half-revealing word;

And on the four winds back to me,
Like freight of wingéd seed,
Came song for song from all the rest—
You only did not heed.

JESSIE B. RITTENHOUSE.



The Crazy Man

By Gene Markey

Author of "Thursday For Crosses"



I SHALL have my coffee on the terrace, please," said Mr. M. F. H. Sims III. blandly, "and be so good, Smollett, as to bring some cognac—a pony of that old Otard Dupuy '87."

Smollett, his senile butler, bowed. Of all the English butlers on the North Shore he was the only one who had ever seen England.

"Yes, sir," he said, and held the door open for his young master.

Monty Sims stepped leisurely out upon the lawn, and, having assured himself that the sunset was well worth looking at, and that there were no mosquitoes, sprawled, with the sigh of a gentleman who has just enjoyed an excellent dinner, into a comfortable wicker chair.

Some one had once told Monty that he looked well in a dinner coat, and from that day forth he had made a fetish of dressing for dinner. In fact it was a favorite story of his great friend, Artie Bangs, the polo player, that Monty had insisted on dressing for dinner each night while they were in Africa one time, hunting big game. On this particular evening, though he had dined alone at "Fairways," the country place he had leased for the season, his person was as elegant, sartorially, as if he had been at dinner with his aunt, the Duchess of Snafflebit, in London.

His mother, who was *the* Mrs. Sims, of New York, and a shrewd old lady, had once aptly characterized her son—he didn't know much, she had said, but people generally liked him, and he played a good game of polo. Certain it was, however, that he appeared to be a well-groomed, rather good-looking young man as he sat on the terrace of Fairways, applying a match to a gold-tipped cigarette and gazing off into the sunset. Not that he was particularly interested in sunsets, but other people always seemed to be, and sunsets were obviously there to look at. Besides, there was not much else to do this evening. The beautiful lady had motored to the city, and would not, he surmised, be returning until late.

With a gentle sigh, which might have indicated any one of a number of lesser emotions, young Mr. Sims glanced over through the hollyhocks in his garden at the pink brick wall that inclosed the beautiful lady's place. Old man Stokes, her father, was an energumen for Georgian architecture, brick walls, and yew trees. Monty had never met him, though he realized that, should his affair with Kay Stokes assume greater proportions, a meeting with the old gentleman, who had a notoriously bad disposition, would be inevitable.

However, it was too pleasant an eve-

ning to bother himself about old man Stokes; it was too pleasant an evening to bother about anything. Here he was, at twenty-six, blessed with a wealthy mother and a good digestion, at peace with the world, and mildly in love. Settling contentedly in his chair, he allowed his gaze to stray out over the pleasant landscape that lay all about. Below him a well-kept lawn stretched down to the edge of the Sachem Hill golf course, which unrolled like a green carpet, from the hedge-hidden road, on the right, until it curved from sight, on the left, behind the Stokes brick wall. On the opposite side, an irregular wood followed the curve in the links, and through the treetops a red roof showed. Monty was curious. It was his first week at Sachem Hill, and he had never noticed the red roof before.

"Smollett," he said, when the old butler had brought his demi-tasse and cognac, "do you happen to know what that red roof is, over the trees, there?"

Smollett squinted across the golf course in the direction indicated.

"Oh, that, sir; that's Doctor Sangwyn Jones' sanitarium, a private institution for the insane."

"You don't tell me!" exclaimed Monty, sitting up. "Well, well! A nut house, eh? Now I know why there are so many squirrels around here."

"Oh, yes, sir," nodded Smollett, who had an egregiously British sense of humor, "and chipmunks, too."

"Chipmunks? No, you don't get me. It's a joke, Smollett. Nuts and squirrels, see? Asylum full of nuts—see?"

"Oh, yes, sir," cackled the old butler, and proceeded to shake with merriment until he was fairly purple about the wattles.

"Not bad, eh?" grinned Mr. Sims, rather pleased with himself. "I must tell that one to Bangs."

It was characteristic of him that he must tell to Artie Bangs any of his scintillant sayings that the butler laughed

at. The butler, being well paid, was, of course, prone to laugh at some very inferior forms of wit, but Mr. Bangs, who had never been known to say anything original, took a great delight in retailing Monty's alleged drolleries.

"Tell me, Smollett," said the erstwhile lord of Fairways, when his servant had at length recovered from the squirrel joke, "how do the people around here like the idea of having this insane asylum so near? I should think it might be dangerous if any of the nuts got loose."

"The inmates," answered Smollett, "are quite a harmless lot, so I'm told, sir. Only lunatics from the best families are admitted, and I've never heard of one escaping, sir."

"By Jove," said Mr. Sims, sipping his cognac reflectively, "I'm glad of that! No, nothing else, Smollett, thank you."

And when the butler had gone in, he fell to watching a pair of golfers disappear down the course, and pondering upon that frailty of human nature which impelled young married people of the Sachem Hill colony to delay their dinners, or hurry away from them, in order that they might whack a foolish little ball over the grass. What an insane procedure, thought Monty, who had, himself, put in a strenuous afternoon at polo up at the Arrogantsia.

It was pleasant upon the terrace, and the faint warmth of the sunset and the excellence of the old cognac were enveloping him in a comfortable glow. All things considered, it looked as if this summer at Fairways were going to prove rather delightful. The house itself, which he had leased from a young Scotchman, was spacious and well-appointed; the grounds and garden pleasing to the eye; and his own staff of servants, if he did say so himself, had no equal around Chicago. Then, best of all, there was the charming proximity of the Stokes place, where dwelt the beautiful lady.

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He had just lighted his second cigarette when his attention was suddenly attracted to the woods opposite. Two men had just emerged hastily and were running across the golf course toward him. With an interested lift of his eyebrows, M. F. H. Sims III. observed that they were hurrying from the direction of the red roof which topped Doctor What's-his-name's private institution for the insane. It was, to say the least, unusual to see any one manifesting haste in the vicinity of Schem Hill, that playground of leisurely moving golfers. Monty's curiosity was thoroughly aroused, and as he watched the pair come sprinting across the turf, he tried to determine whether one was chasing the other or whether they were engaged in a foot race.

All at once it occurred to him that they might be escaped lunatics, and, the idea being vaguely alarming, he rose and took up a position within discreet distance of the house. But as they approached he noted, with a measure of relief, that they were similarly attired in some sort of blue uniforms; that they were burly, red-faced individuals, who looked as though they should, by rights, have belonged to some police force. As they galloped up over the crescent-shaped bunker in front of Fairways, one of them pointed to Mr. Sims and shouted something unintelligible to the other, whereupon both halted and fell to mopping their brows with large red handkerchiefs.

"Hey," bawled the more husky of the pair, "didja see a guy go by here jus' now?"

"Somebody," replied Mr. Sims with dignity, "passed here a few moments ago—playing golf. Could that have been—"

"Hell no!" bawled the second uniformed man. "This here bird we're after has jus' eck-scaped from the san'tarium over there!" indicating, with a thumb, the red roof over the trees.

"You don't tell me!" exclaimed Monty. "What did he—"

But the asylum guards tarried not to explain. They were already in motion again on the trail of their quarry.

"'F ya see an'thing of a cuckoo runnin' aroun' loose," shouted the first one, over his shoulder, "grab onto 'im. He won't hurcha. He's harmless!"

And they were gone through the trees on the other side of the house. Young Mr. Sims sat down again and puffed thoughtfully at his cigarette. Strange that a lunatic should have escaped from that place just as he and Smollett had finished talking about it. A crazy man! Well! The thought was somewhat disturbing. And yet, those guards had assured him that the crazy man was harmless. At least *that* was reassuring. There was no immediate need of going inside.

He settled back comfortably again in his wicker chair, and blew a smoke ring skyward. The situation, he mused, was decidedly unique. In his peregrinations about the globe he had done just about everything that would produce a thrill from sticking wild boars, in Algiers, to looping the loop with Jimmy Rubel, the youngest American ace, but he had never in his life come face to face with a crazy man.

When he glanced out toward the golf links, a second later, he blinked in amazement, and with a startled exclamation leaped to his feet. For there, not a hundred yards away, was a funny-looking little man in a bright-red coat, running round and round the bunker—now and then making frantic swoops at the air with his hat. Monty stared. He had not seen him approach; he had simply looked up suddenly, and there the little man was, running round and round in that absurd way, as if chasing something. Yet Monty could see perfectly well that there was nothing to chase. Nothing whatever.

Here, of course, was the escaped

crazy man. There were no two ways about it. It was up to M. F. H. Sims III. to apprehend him and hold him until the guards arrived. Yet how to go about it? The guards had assured him that the man was harmless, yet he had heard somewhere that demented persons were difficult to manage. Uncertain, therefore, as to what his next move should be, Monty inspected the lunatic curiously. He was a ridiculously funny little man, with a glistening bald head, and as he scampered crazily this way and that, making frantic swoops with his hat, the tails of his red coat flapping behind him, Monty was reminded of a decapitated chicken he had once seen in his youth.

Then suddenly the crazy man veered off in the direction of the house, and came zigzagging toward Mr. Sims, who was awaiting him expectantly, albeit somewhat nervously. The little man's face was crimson, and, as he came toward the house, leaping and bounding like a red-coated antelope of unbalanced mentality, Monty could hear him muttering savagely to himself. On up the lawn he came, scurrying to and fro in a most amazing fashion, apparently entirely oblivious of the presence of any one else, until he ran plumb into young Mr. Sims. Then it was that the little man stopped short, his face purple with wrath, his little black eyes snapping, and burst into a profane torrent of abuse.

"Damn it, sir, he got away from me! Do you *hear*? He got away from me! If you hadn't been in my way, confound you——"

He shook his fist furiously in Monty's face, and Monty retreated a step, not entirely sure, by Jove, that the fellow was harmless.

"He got away from me, I tell you!" shouted the little man, throwing his hat upon the ground and stamping on it in a plethora of rage. "Another minute and I'd have caught him!"

"That's all right," said Monty soothingly. "You'll catch him yet!"

The little man glared round him in all directions.

"I won't," he snapped; "there's no sign of him! And it's all your fault, confound you! If you hadn't——"

"There, there," soothed Monty, patting him on the sleeve of his red coat, "there, there, I'll get you another. Sit down. Let's talk this thing over calmly."

"Calmly be damned, sir! Get me another! Why, blast your impertinence, I'll *never* be able to find another like it! I'll never——"

"Come," smiled Mr. Sims, with great good nature, "sit down and have a pony of cognac with me. It's a very fine old cognac," he wheedled; "Otar Dupuy '87."

"Otard your grandmother!" roared the little man in the red coat. "What's cognac compared to a rhopalocerous *lepidoptera*, sir?"

Monty blinked. Of course, that was rather a poser! He had not the faintest idea whether the fellow was talking about a disease or something to eat. He *did* know, however, that the man was crazy, crazy beyond a shadow of doubt.

"Of course, of course," he admitted affably, "this rho—whatever-you-called-it probably was——"

"Probably was!" exploded the little man, stamping his foot wrathfully. "Why, you infernal young scoundrel, I've never *seen* such a specimen in this part of the country! I've never——"

He was growing violent. There was but one course for Monty to pursue, and he made up his mind in a twinkling to pursue it. With a prodigious leap he seized upon the little man, pinioned his arms behind him, and shouted lustily for Smollett, for Wyatt and Surrey, the gardeners, even for Kyd, the chauffeur. Meanwhile the crazy man was setting up a most fearful hullabaloo—howling, cursing, kicking his captor on

the shins, and even attempting to bite that unhappy young gentleman's hands.

But with the arrival of Smollett and the reinforcements, who came on the run from all directions, the victim was borne, struggling and blaspheming, up the lawn and into the house.

"Lock him up in that closet by the front door," directed Monty, calm as a field marshal, but puffing from the exertion. "We'll keep the poor fellow until those guards come back this way."

Speedily the thing was done, and as muffled sounds of kicks and threats and maledictions emanated from within the closet, young Mr. Sims strolled, with the air of a conqueror, out upon the veranda again, pausing a moment to assure Mrs. Austen, the housekeeper, Beaumont and Fletcher, the maids, and even Eliot, the cook, all of whom had been attracted by the commotion, that "everything was all right—just a poor crazy man escaped from the asylum across the way there."

"Now that this silly rumpus is all over, Smollett," he said, rearranging his tie and running a hand over his hair, which had become disarranged in the *mêlée*, "I think I'll finish my coffee on the lawn. And you *might* bring me another pony of cognac."

"Yes, sir," smiled the old butler.

The pink glow of the sunset had not faded over the trees when Monty resumed his wicker chair and, with a sigh of relief, lighted a cigarette. Quite a bit of excitement for one evening. And they had told him that Sachem Hill was such a quiet place. Anyway, he would have an amusing tale to tell the beautiful lady when he next saw her, though he must be careful not to make himself out too much of a hero. Artie Bangs, too, must be informed of the incident. Ah, *there* was a fellow who'd make a good story out of it, a story that would improve amazingly with successive tellings.

There was an agreeable, pastoral calm pervading the grounds of Fairways. A hidden orchestra of crickets was beginning a nocturne, pleasantly soothing to the ear, while from the direction of the little lake in front of the Berwyn place, down the road, came the chant of a frogs' choral society. In a little while it would begin to grow dark, and a sly moon would creep up over the woods. All was quiet now within the house. The crazy man, in his closet dungeon, apparently had subsided. Before long the guards would be coming back for him.

As Monty finished his *café noir*, and set down the cup on the broad arm of the wicker chair, his glance roved over the links and he observed a solitary golfer on the tee, a couple of hundred yards away, just in the act of "driving off." It was not at all unusual for golf enthusiasts to play around until dark, and this fellow, who had no caddy with him, had evidently come up the course while they were engaged in incarcerating the crazy man. With the casual interest of one who does not play the game, Monty watched him arrange his ball on the tee, assume an attitude and take a tremendous swing. *Whack!* A second later something clipped the leaves of a tall elm on the lawn and a little white ball dropped at Monty's feet. Well! The fellow had evidently "pulled" his drive—was that what they called it?—and the ball had curved off, out of bounds. It was not an unusual occurrence—the same thing had happened two or three times before in the week—and so long as the ball did not drop on Mr. Sims' cranium, there was no particular harm done.

He saw that the fellow had shouldered his white golf bag and was coming down the course. At that distance he looked like a decent sort, young, well set up, clad in flannels and a white shirt. Monty waited for him to come along.

"Your ball," he called good-naturedly

as the golfer fell to searching for it, "came up here!"

The young man looked up.

"I'm *awfully* sorry," he apologized in a pleasant voice. "Hope it didn't disturb you."

"Not in the least."

"Been pulling my drives altogether too much lately," he explained, crossing the lawn. "Mighty sorry to have bothered you, sir."

"No bother at all," said Mr. Sims affably, noting as the stranger approached that he was sun-browned and healthy-looking, in the early thirties, possibly. Monty himself had but recently become a member of the Sachem Hill Club, and it occurred to him that since this chap must also belong, they should introduce themselves. It was bad form, of course, but then—this was Chicago. Monty decided to take the initiative.

"My name is Sims," he said, rising and extending his hand.

"Mine," smiled the stranger, putting down his golf bag and taking the hand, "is Shaw."

Whereupon each muttered something banal, and Mr. Shaw stooped to pick up his truant golf ball.

Now Monty, who had not dwelt long in the self-confident Middle West, and who was far better acquainted with the social customs of Long Island or England, was not quite sure as to the proper procedure. Both were obviously members of the club, and Shaw, since he had come upon the grounds of Fairways, was technically his guest. The hospitable thing to do would be to invite him to sit down and have a cigarette and a drink. While he mentally debated this fine point Mr. Shaw recovered his golf bag and turned to go.

"I must be getting along," he said, "it's rather late to be playing."

"I say," put in Monty, the perfect host, "would you care to sit down and have a drop of something to drink?"

"Drink?" cried Shaw, his eyes lighting up as if he had just been informed of a legacy of a million dollars. "Did you say *drink*?"

"I did," smiled Mr. Sims, with that rare joviality which denotes the possessor of a cellar. "What will you have?"

"Great guns!" exclaimed the visitor, dropping his golf bag with a clatter. "This is indeed hospitality! What will I have? What *may* I have?" And he sank into the other wicker chair and beamed up at his host expectantly.

"Well," said Monty, "I've been indulging in a little cognac, but if you'd prefer—"

"Cognac," laughed his unexpected guest, "would be wonderful! I can't tell you, sir, how much I appreciate your hospitality."

"A pleasure, I'm sure." Mr. Sims dismissed the subject with a magnanimous wave of his hand, and called to his butler.

And as they sat, sipping their cognac and puffing their cigarettes, both praised most highly by Mr. Shaw, Monty had a chance to observe that his guest seemed a decent sort, well-mannered, intelligent—rather a Chicago type, to be sure, but not sufficiently so to be annoying. In fact Monty was quite taken with him. They discussed the usual things that young bachelors, who don't know each other awfully well, *do* discuss, not omitting those reliable conversational stand-bys, motor cars and prohibition, and Monty was pleased to note an increasing respect in his guest's attitude when he informed him that he, Monty, was a member of the Arrogantsia polo team.

They seemed to be enjoying their chat, each talking about himself as much as the other would permit, as is the way with men, and they were getting on rather famously.

"I don't know," ventured Monty, when they had about exhausted every

subject of conversation, "I don't know quite what to think of the political situation."

Of course he did not know. Like most young men of his type, he knew nothing whatever about the political situation, but unlike most young men of his type he wished to appear to know a great deal about it.

"It seems to me," he went on, frowning importantly, and attempting to look very wise, "it seems to me that this League of Nations——"

"What? League of Nations! Yow!" With a fiendish shriek Mr. Shaw leaped into the air and hurled his cognac glass skyward, his former gentlemanly self metamorphosed, with Jekyll-Hydelike swiftness, into a raving maniac. So sudden was this outburst that Monty Sims fell over backward, and lay on his back, feet in air, like a terrified beetle, while his guest hopped up and down, howling and yowling at the top of his voice.

"League of Nations!" he screamed, kicking over the wicker chair in which he had been seated so quietly a moment before. "League of Nations! Yah! Yow! Wo-o-ow!" and he went off into a fit of bloodcurdling laughter, dealing sturdy kicks at whatever happened to be nearest him.

In abject terror Monty rolled over and started to crawl from under his upturned chair. Just as he cast a wild eye about for a means of escape, there came a rush of footsteps, and Mr. Shaw's amazing vocal efforts ended in a dismal wail.

"A-ha!" roared a husky voice that sounded strangely familiar. "You wasn't tryin' t' git away from us, was you, Horace? Oh, no, Horace; nothing like that!"

The erstwhile lord of Fairways peered furtively out from behind his capsized chair, and with an expression of profound relief, his eyes fell upon the welcome figures of the two burly

guards from the asylum. They were holding Mr. Shaw firmly, one on each side of him, and that gentleman had subsided into an attitude of meek docility.

"Well, Horace," the other guard was saying genially, "you give us quite a merry chase. Got some golf sticks with ya, too, by golly! Well, come on, let's be goin' home now, Horace; we're goin' ta have apple pie fer supper!"

Assuming as much dignity as was possible under the circumstances, Mr. M. F. H. Sims III. picked himself up, shot his cuffs, and faced the little group from Doctor Jones' private institution for the insane.

"What," he asked fatuously, "what seems to be the trouble?"

"Why, Horace, here," said the first guard, "is the guy we was after."

"But you said," began Monty, "you said he was harmless."

"He is," grinned the other guard, "most of the time. You must of did somethin' t' git 'im mad."

"All I did," said Mr. Sims in an injured tone, "was to mention the League of——"

"Yow!" bellowed his late guest, kicking violently at his captors. "Yow! Wow!"

"Sh-h!" comforted the guards in unison. "There, there, Horace!" And under the anodyne of their soothing voices, Mr. Shaw lapsed into docile submission once more.

"Well!" exclaimed the amazed Monty, "I'll be——"

"He's a newspaper editor," explained one of the guards in a whisper, as they started to lead their captive away, "an' he went cuckoo on the subjc of the League o' Nations!"

As the perplexed Mr. Sims stood there, staring after the three departing figures, the raucous horn of a motor car sounded from the drive in front of the house. The servants, aroused

by this last disturbance, were being herded back indoors by the masterful Smollett, as Monty crossed the veranda and went through the hallway to the front door. That was the horn of the beautiful lady's car! Forgetful of everything else, he waited not for Smollett to open the door, but rushed out himself. Her green roadster was on the drive in front of the steps, and at the wheel sat the beautiful lady herself, presenting a most alluring picture. "Hel-lo!" greeted Monty joyously. "I thought you were going to be in town till late."

"It was too hot for the theater, so I came on home," said the beautiful lady, favoring him with one of those smiles of hers that were so frequently reproduced in the society columns of Chicago's newspapers. "Would you care to go for a little drive?"

"Would I?" exclaimed Monty. "Wait'll I get my hat!"

"There's no one home at my house," said she. "Father's out chasing butter-

flies, so the maids told me. You know, his pet hobby is collecting butterflies. In fact——"

Her words were drowned in a sudden, tempestuous burst of noise from inside the house, the noise of some one banging furiously upon a door and shouting wrathful, unintelligible imprecations.

"Great heavens!" cried the beautiful lady. "That sounds like father! It is! It's father's voice!"

Mr. M. F. H. Sims III. stood dumbly up the steps, a foolish smile upon his face. Inside the house he could hear the priceless Smollett rushing to let the old gentleman out. Smollett must have heard her say that the noise in the closet was her father's voice. Her father!

"It is!" the beautiful lady was saying excitedly. "It's father! Why, *Monty Sims*!"

"Oh," gulped the unfortunate Monty, "I guess—I guess there must have been some mistake!"



MARY SAID

THREE old men came and knelt low, low,
And their gifts at our manger piled.
But I did not need their worship to know
The wonder of my child!

A star stood over the stable door
Brighter than torches are.
Swift came the shepherds over the moor.
But had I need of a star?

For I looked as you'll look at your own; and oh,
At his touch I was hushed and awed;
And, as surely as you or yours will know,
I knew that he was God.

MARY CAROLYN DAVIES.



W e g

By Violet Irwin



CHAPTER VII.

CORNELIUS lay supine in the bottom of a punt, knees drawn up, head pillowed on his arms, his mind a happy blank. Opposite the girl of girls rested, recumbent, one brown hand holding a "gasper," the other flirting with the River Thames.

Suddenly, in agonized remembrance of last evening's panic, he sat erect. "Holy cats! Do you realize you haven't told me your name yet, nor given me a ghost of an address?"

She looked up, coolly surprised, and he slid the vehemence of the action off, or hoped he did, by fumbling in his hip pocket for a match.

"No need to turn handsprings over it and upset the punt. Call me Weg."

"W-e-g—Weg. Is that your name?" Cornelius gave vent to his feelings in exclamation rather than question, and was surprised to see her color.

"No, since you ask with such engaging candor, it is not my name. But it is what I am called."

"Pardon me. I only ask because I know of a girl called Meg—the names are awfully similar—and I was wishing rather she could be like you."

"Know of," thought Weg to herself. "Now what does that mean? An obligation in Sue Luck City? He introduces the theme with the soft pedal down, lyrical motif and all, expresses a preference about her, yet doesn't admit even a bowing acquaintance. And he's neither a fool nor a snob. This

portends a here to-day and gone to-morrow attitude to England, with a story in the background—a waiting romance. Maybe there's a catch in his father's will; maybe he has a fiancée—a flapper. It's a bunker for Roselle!"

Suddenly all the joints in Weg's spine seemed to fall together. She shivered under the spotlight of facts. "What am I doing here?" she groaned. "Earning a living? Bah! Enjoying myself. Having a spiffing day. Entering the lists against my own sister. What would Letitia say if she saw us! What would sis say? Is it square? Is this playing the game?" She flayed herself with negatives, and her nimble wits leaped back to a former idea. "Suppose he is engaged? We never thought of it—might be—almost sure to be. What a sell! I must help sis by finding out;—only decent thing to do now. Wonder if I could induce him to sing me his soul saga. Better begin by self-expression perhaps." So she spoke.

"Being such a jack-of-all-trades, I have learned there's umpteen things in names—a spade wouldn't look anything like as effective if it were called a pickle fork. One's names must suit environment; mine always do. As a chauffeur I dubbed myself Louis; in the bakery, Mary Anne; on the films I'm Olivia; and in the air force and the legion it was Bill or Billy; up at Fenny, where I hung around a while without a car, they used to call me Billy, the little spare part."

Cornelius gazed at her earnestly, murmuring: "The air force and the legion!" Momentarily his heart had almost stopped. But the name Bill settled it; in uniform she had been Bill. Romance must have hallowed some other head upon his spare pillow.

As always in moments of danger, Weg turned to action.

"Time to be legging—what?"

"So early?"

"For those of us who are going on it is late." Her fingers closed over the pole before his. "Napoo! I yearn for exercise. This time you can study from example."

Easily, gracefully, she plunged the unwieldy thing into the water and allowed it to glide back. Erect as a sapling, with just the needed twist of supple wrists, she pulled it up and brought it forward. Lost in admiration, Cornelius watched her. She was so small and dainty, and affected so adroitly that which he had lumbered over.

Whole-souled in punting as in other pursuits, Weg let her mind go with the happy swing and rhythm of the motion till recalled by his voice:

"Sweet Pandora! Dear Pandora!
Why did mighty Jove create thee
Coy as Thetis, fair as Flora,
Beautiful as young Aurora,
If to win thee is—"

He stopped abruptly.

There are limits to feminine endurance. This was arrant love-making, but loyalty, though it need not bend before, must at least bob to curiosity. Weg covered her deflection with off-hand levity, crying:

"Contact!"

"How's that?"

"Contact. Go ahead. Swing the prop—proceed. I'm enjoying this fresh outburst from your favorite poet. Behold art inspiring labor!"

"My national, not my favorite," Tomlins corrected with a nice precision he occasionally borrowed from the law.

"Carry on," she charged impatiently. But he shook his head.

"Nothing doing! It's a lie—the next. In this case I'm sure it would prove a whopper. And what follows—it can't be done. No, no! Not yet."

When a young man starts on a teasing note and ends in confusion it is time for him to take heed how he steps. Cornelius cast a glance at the precipice and drew back. What impelling devil had prompted him to that "yet"? His silence hurried her apprehensions into speech. She sought for any words—the relief of sound. They were drifting far, far from his soul saga.

"I never realized American business magnates were wont to break forth in song."

"Cut out the magnate stuff—that was the old man's rôle. I'm not in the captain class at all. Yours truly is a poor dub of a lawyer who never made good at the law. Compare my chances with father's and his record with mine."

She waited for him to continue.

"Father would never have 'burst into song,' as you put it; but he admired poetry. He liked it read aloud in the evenings—or pretended he did.

"I often wonder how much the old man took in. I doubt if he paid attention to more than the general sound. I believe that soothing hour after dinner was the time when he thought out most of his good schemes." Cornelius paused reflectively.

Weg, at a loss for apt reply, busied herself with the pole, while the long-dammed stream of a man's rare confidence poured into her ears.

"How his soul will be wasted on Roselle!" she thought.

"It's a walk-over for me. I don't even have to sell his machines; they sell themselves. I just sit and gather in the dollars and try to do the right thing by the factory hands. You can't think how much I admired father—he was a genius—but it's impossible for me to

follow in his footsteps. The gifts of politics and ambition were left out of my make-up. I don't want more money and more stores and bigger factories. The happiest days I have ever spent were on a ranch, riding from sunrise till starlight."

"You'd look well in 'em, too," Weg interrupted.

"How's that?"

"In those things with fur on the legs."

"Oh, chaps! I'm not planning Buffalo Bill stunts. Any corner where I'll find fish in the stream and a sunset behind low hills—that's good enough for me."

"Your program won't suit sis," Weg thought, wondering if he had ever read her the lines of his leading lady's part. A tiny worry indicated itself on the girl's brow. She sensed another catch in their fairy tale; but this time it was not Roselle's comfort she bothered about.

"His will demand a marble cottage at Newport, a yacht, winters on the Riviera, and Junes in London; and she won't think he's treating her right if he fails to provide them."

She saw a vision of Cornelius dragged from post to pillar, from dinners to operas, from New York to Paris. In his exalted predilection for duty sacrificing genuine happiness to the fashionable whirl and the grind of his wife's chariot wheels.

Weg regarded him sorrowfully as a lamb whom she had led to the slaughter with her own brown hand—"and he such a good sort." Then she fell to wondering how that verse about Pandora ended.

CHAPTER VIII.

Albert's telegram, handed to Roselle across her cousin Ermystrude Maltravers' dinner table at seven-forty-five p. m., first raised her to a seventh

heaven, thrilled her with those half-fearful, utterly wild anticipations known only to the novice in adventure, and then dashed a bucket of ice water over the thrill. Noting the hour, her spirits descended into black subterranean disappointment.

A simple enough communication, it seemed to arouse such vivid feelings. Merely: "Can you dine to-night? If so be at the Savoy at a quarter of eight. Higginbotham Bones."

Aunt Letitia, forwarding it from Hertfordshire, wondered why Bella always signed her telegrams with that outlandish second name; but her niece admired Albert's discretion.

Nevertheless, the damsel raged. One does not need to be a gourmand to lose one's temper over receiving a perfectly good invitation to a feast, when one has just finished dining early, and alone, and none too well, on the cold wing of yesterday's chicken, in the house of a patronizing relative. Ill chance seemed to be dogging Roselle's footsteps.

To begin with, Ermystrude, hearing a rumor of millions, and willing to do her bit toward the family honor, had invited her cousin up for a week. The girl jumped at it, and the date was settled, after the law of the Medes and Persians, before she discovered, furiously, she was to be in town the week of all weeks when Bella Bones tripped off to Brighton dragging her gilded spouse in her wake; and that Tomlins, left alone, would be given practically the run of the Maltravers mansion.

Things could not have been better contrived from a matchmaker's point of view. Roselle preferred Cornelius to the background like an old-age insurance policy, and was far from anxious to bring matters to a head. She could not forgive the possessive manner which had descended on him after coming out of that ridiculous gypsy tent. She had snubbed him right and left, but the more she snubbed him the

grimmer grew his determination, till, bombarded by orchids and sweets in Berkeley Square, she cried out:

"It is too perfectly absurd! We are not engaged. He doesn't own me—yet. And maybe never will."

With such veiled threats the maiden bolstered her independence. Lady Maltravers only raised shapely eyebrows.

"I might refuse him—probably shall in the end—just from natural disinclination. I don't believe I could stand him."

Lady Ermytrude, who successfully practiced the philosophy of agreement, looked amused. After all, her future was not at stake.

"Quite according to Hoyle," she said. "A touch of disappointment will not do the youth any harm. I'll telephone Johnny to meet us, and we can run out to Hurlingham for a change."

But when, the following afternoon, Cornelius cut Roselle off cold without a word of warning, the older woman rubbed her lesson in.

"I dare say what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander in America. He looks a perfect lamb—well, a sheep, if you prefer—but he is human. You'll find some acid in his nature to alloy the gold, my dear."

And with that the heartless creature had swept out, leaving Roselle to eat a dinner of herbs.

The leading lady frowned; this thought had brought her hard against a barrier.

Roselle built her debts scientifically, as a modern engineer builds a skyscraper, laying the foundations wide and deep, and rearing the superstructure to heaven in glorious defiance. Unfortunately Roths' Well no longer reinforced a fast disintegrating credit. Those beggars of tradesmen were kicking; threatening to knock her tower about her ears. She dared not tell her father—besides, to what end? If he carried enough in his pocket these days

to tip the caddie he was lucky. She had not the face to go to her aunt again—so soon—and Ermytrude was in over head and ears to the blighters herself. She must tide over somehow. An announced engagement with Tomlins would give her a new lease of life.

Tomlins was certainly not the sort whose money a woman could spend before the ceremony. He simply did not know how to take a hint. One might talk about the sordid side of things till doomsday without forcing his imagination so far as a bill. Doubtless such density becomes a virtue in a married man—but Roselle's situation was immediate, acute. How was she going to get from under?

Albert's discreetly worded invitation carried with it sudden vista of escape. He knew the game in and out, back and front, up and down. What a joy after Tomlins' stupidity! He would pay high for ever so little—the girl shrank from the crudity of her own thought—and with Bella on his track he would be safe—how safe! Roselle, smiling, glanced back to his telegram, then quickly at her wrist watch, and jumped from her chair. Inspiration flashed on her.

It was barely seven-fifty now, and her cousin lived in the heart of things. A touch or two with the rabbit's foot, a fluffing up of naturally lovely hair, a lightning change of shoes, Ermytrude's gayest cloak flung about her shoulders to redeem a shabby frock, and all this in less time than it takes to catalog it. The taxi throbbed below. With a last self-intoxicated glance at her own fair face above the rosy velvet, Roselle swept out to victory.

Albert was waiting; after such a telegram he was bound to wait. He greeted her with the fervent warmth of his nature, escorted her through the lounge, and beckoned a waiter. None knew better than he that golden wine

and the right liqueur inclineth a maiden's heart.

Roselle pranced in like the Queen of Sheba, and presented her shoulders to the cloakroom attendant, who, turning from an aged dowager, crused in paste, dropped her decorum and raised her voice:

"Whoops, darie!"

Two comfortable dames, smothering the flush of their last champagne before moving on to the next, stopped, powder puffs suspended. Roselle, electrified, swung round and faced her sister. There stood Weg, demurely clad in the pearl-gray uniform and dainty apron of her calling, and full to the brim with laughter.

"Hello, old bean! I felt when I took the job we'd meet sooner or later. How is dad?"

If looks could kill, Roselle must have swung for hers. They did, however, only produce titters.

"On the films," muttered the fatter matron, classing them both instinctively in her own original station.

It was a bitter pill, and Roselle had not sufficient humor to spot the obvious and spurn it. Angrily she moved away.

"Here's your ticket," called Weg, holding out the numbered check. "If I'm not on duty when you leave, for Heaven's sake don't lose cousin Ermyntrude's cloak!"

It was a mean thing to do; she herself would have been the first to own it mean, had not snobbishness aroused the tiger in her. The other women laughed. Roselle, in turning, faced them, and was suddenly conscious of her shabby dress; but conscious in the grand manner.

"I have changed my mind. I think I will take the cloak," she answered icily.

"Very good, miss," Weg mimicked.

Her acting carried less conviction than Roselle's sincere hauteur. The two giggling worms, so magnificently

ignored, became aware of their mistake, and crawled out as the cloak was being untagged. The sisters stood alone together.

"Where is Mrs. Bones?" Weg asked all at once, looking about.

"In Brighton," snapped Roselle.

"My holy aunt! And Bones is here; I saw him hanging around at seventy-three looking full of beans. You're dining alone with him. No use denying it—what a beastly thing to do!"

"Shut up! Give me that wrap."

It is difficult to prevent the menial who holds your coat from lecturing into your ear at the same time, particularly if the menial is a blood relation and enjoys the advantage of being in the right. Roselle had to grin and bear it as Weg's voice flowed on:

"Dad may live on Letitia and all that, but he's a thoroughbred. There is one line the Rothwells never allowed their women to take, and he won't stand for it either—I warn you, sis."

"He won't stand for you being a maid."

"He won't be asked. Honest labor has its own reward of independence. I'm not a sponge like some others."

"Damn!" said Roselle, and, wreathing herself in a smile, stepped out to meet her host.

"However, did you manage it? You wonder!" she asked a little later while toying with an entrée.

"Got Tomlins to wire important business and came up a day ahead. Bella arrives to-morrow." He sighed. "She must have her spells of rest between the fashions; but I certainly do wish she would take them slower. Beaches and bath chairs are a sinful waste of a man's life."

Roselle sighed, too. "It must be wonderful to tire oneself out buying clothes. How simply spiffing to have *carte blanche* in the shops!"

"I expect you do," he said. "Anyway you couldn't look better."

That was not the type of compliment she wished from him to-night, so she allowed the gorgeous outer garment to slip down and disparage her frock. "This old rag—but it has to do."

Nor was she the first young, sweet thing to draw on Albert's check book under similar circumstances. He noted the words and the gesture, her sigh and her pout, and, adding two with two, made an admirable guess at four.

"Must do! Madame acting ugly, eh? Now that's a shame." And so on. "My dear girl, be sensible. Have a heart. Give me the pleasure—for the present at least." And to her blushing negative: "Tut, tut! No harm in it. Why, I'm an old foggy—old enough to be your father."

She would never know how much the bald statement cost his pride, when, alarmed at the genuineness of her embarrassment, he was driven to clinch it. For Roselle had been embarrassed, horribly so. She was a lady and a Rothwell, and, as Weg had reminded her, the clan did not run to certain forms of weakness.

Planning an attack with all the moves in her own control and carrying it out under the eyes of the accomplice, she found two different matters. She ached with self-pity and shame; wanted to scream when he treated it as settled; and shrank when he patted her hand by way of encouragement. But after her third glass of wine, relief commenced to sing its welcome ditty—friendship glowed in roseate hues. If Albert had made her promise to afford him the same joyous gratification she so liberally offered to aunt Letitia, why—he was a dear old thing, and ought to be humored. She felt very grateful to him for dropping the subject. Gratitude welled in her, melting her mood. She was no longer resentful when he gave her fingers a squeeze under the table and took her arm as they walked into the palm room.

He turned suddenly—swiftly—changed!

Could this be Albert, steady of gait, upright in carriage, crowned by the dignity and silver head of sixty years? This flying figure, leaping and bounding, with coat tails flapping and hair on end, whether from speed or fear, and eyes staring and excited tongue rich in vernacular!

"Quick, my girl, skidoo! Vamose! Get out! Bella's here and she's going to raise Cain; I saw her paying off the taxicab. Into the cloakroom with you and lie low; if she scents your trail she'll pull the house down."

Albert's manner was compelling. It compelled Roselle to rise at once. An instant she trembled between the red roses of wine and song and the lily of a fair reputation. Then her brain cleared. She realized she was up against it, made three leaps, and landed at the sheltering door just as Bella swooped past to the stairs.

Most of the diners had drifted out, and supper parties had not yet arrived. Albert, seated alone amid a waste of empty chairs, looked both conspicuous and unconvincing. Useless for him to light a fat cigar and puff, ignoring fate. Medusa stood upon the stairs in traveling hat and wraps, her face ablaze with that most blasting ire—righteous indignation. Lifting her arm and voice as one, she pointed her command:

"Albert Bones! Come here."

And her husband, versed in the precept of the gentle answer, meekly rose and went toward it.

"Where's that girl?" she trumpeted in clarion notes.

"What girl, my dear?"

His replies could only be guessed by the two or three odd groups lingering in the corners of the room, but hers rang clearly.

"Do not deceive me. They told me at Pink's you had ordered a table for two."

"Quite a mistake—oh, ah—Tomlins," Albert muttered, very much shaken and vowing Pink's should pay for this.

Belinda snorted. A weaker word would not convey the sound.

"Don't tell me, Albert Bones, you ordered two liqueurs for yourself alone—and Tomlins ain't a drinking man!" She turned on her heel, and, headed for the cloakroom, threw a final challenge over her shoulder: "I saw that pink cloak scuttle out."

Roselle plunged wildly into the ante-room, threw the incriminating wrap about her sister's shoulders, and crying: "Mrs. Bones! Quick, Weg—if she sees me we're lost!" and disappeared again.

It was Weg's turn to snort. But she was a level-headed, quick-witted girl, and much too deeply imbued with the cult of family to stand still for mental or spiritual gymnastics while scandal's pack yelped at her sister's heels. Tearing off her cap and apron, she gathered the covering garment close, and, head erect, advanced to meet the foe.

To the delight of the spectators the women met in full view just outside the door.

Bella fell back. She had set her mind on seeing Roselle in that pink cloak, and this sudden apparition of a stranger knocked her advantage into a cocked hat. For a moment she doubted, and doubt betrayed her. But her surprise was as nothing to Albert's. Flabbergasted, he beheld wrapped round with that familiar flame of color, not the guilty Roselle, but, as he afterward confided to Tomlins, "The grandest little bit of Eve's flesh who ever graced God's earth."

Weg was not one to do things by halves. She might have swept past and left Mrs. Bones, silenced but unconvinced, to rummage out her victim. Only by identifying herself with Albert could she stop the hunt. With a withering glance at the frantic Bella she turned toward him. She was at ease.

Her tiny pearl-gray shoes halted deliberately and proudly on each of the shallow steps. When she had come quite up to him she said in the softest, most silvery voice:

"Will you be good enough to order a taxi for me, Mr. Bones?"

And his wife, staggered, allowed him to escort her to the door. She knew her Albert, knew he was no actor, marked his manner and his formal bow. And Weg looked so very much the lady—possibly she was somebody's wife. She was evidently a person for consideration. Bella's wrath simmered down in face of her mistake; quietly she waited his return and explanation.

A situation needing some invention on his part—but Weg had not considered him; she was acting for their family honor.

"He'll get her away," she thought, sitting in the taxi, ready to go back for Roselle, "and if he has a bad time later it'll serve him right." Then, "I'll get the sack for being off duty. No more idle hours, and no need of prevarication to Cornelius Tomlins after all, so that's that."

CHAPTER IX.

The August heat wave emptied London of the season's dregs. It was terrific. Even Weg consented to give up and go home for a breathing spell.

Life at the rectory, she declared, grew more interesting every day. They were waking up, surrounding themselves with what the Americans call "live wires." Her father, of course, would never change; but he only appeared at breakfast and dinner, golfing between acts. Since the general's romantic collapse that gentleman had fought shy of their place, so Colonel Rothwell now drove to Lawlor House. He had quarreled manfully with his sister over the affair, giving vent to anger in bitter and condescending phrases.

Letitia, bracing herself, told him she had "other plans"—the most radical speech of her life.

He scorned an unmarried woman's plans, and in his lordly way hoped she would "come round and take a sensible view." This hope, putting him in the right as it did, made it easier for him to use her car and other ornaments of their mutual life, such as wines, tobacco, and garden chairs. Still things were strained between them.

Roselle, separated from the Bones and Tomlins, moped openly. Her honey-colored head bowed itself under a sense of failure. Everybody thought her a muddler, and Ermytrude spoke pointedly on the subject.

"There is positively no sense in giving a helping hand to a girl who doesn't know her own mind. You will be jolly lucky if you ever land him now, my dear."

This sort of remark was too true to be welcome. They parted bad friends.

Roselle, instead of her usual round of visits, rusticated in Hertfordshire, dashing up to town for a day every little while. Weg could not help wondering why. But she was now far outside her sister's confidence. Instead of showing gratitude, the older girl seemed to resent that night at the Savoy.

To offset these family limitations aunt Letitia was on the spot—a perfect dear, as ever—jingling about her tasks with the fluttering grace of a butterfly and the expedition of a locust.

"Growing younger every day, old bean. You accomplish more in an hour than Roselle does in a week; and you've improved the staff so much."

Letitia beamed.

"You always are ready to believe in people. It is one of the sweetest things about you—expecting the best, and finding it, too. That Irishwoman you sent us from Pooley Street is making Arthur perfectly happy; the cottage has

never been so comfortable nor his meals so well served."

"Katie O'Leary's all to the good. A bit of real luck meeting her in the bake-shop, wasn't it? But don't let her make the man too blissful. Contented bachelors are a drug in the market these days."

Aunt Letitia swung her garden hat on one finger and blushed like a girl. "I will try not to be so careless as Roselle. I'm at the other end of the ladder," she replied demurely.

Weg stared and laughed; and remembered the speech again in the afternoon as she strolled across the tennis court toward Mosely's cottage.

"Old Arthur cops the family fortune dollop, or I'm mistaken. And a damned good thing, too," was her second thought. "He and Draper are the only ones around these digs who care a hoot for aunt Letitia's interests!"

"Yirra! Is it yourself then?" the newly installed housekeeper cried within the door. "Shure and it's a sight for sore eyes ye are. It is, indeed."

"Prepare yourself for an awful frost, Katie, old thing. It's not you I have come to see at all, but a book; and I'm not anxious for Mr. Mosely to see me looking at it either, so I scouted round a bit. He's prowling in the garden, smoking his after-tea fag. Don't you peep that I am here, like a good girl."

The speaker turned her back on a broad Irish grin and opened the door. Directly she set foot over the threshold Arthur Mosely hurried to the window, and such was the expression of his glowing face that Weg came as near being covered with confusion as at any moment in her life.

Mosely's living room opened onto a pocket-handkerchief lawn surrounded by rosebushes set against a high hedge. The place was immaculately neat, for here he took his exercise of an evening and, like all vegetation which is loved

and tended, it returned its hundredfold. The hour was after five. Already long shadows from the rectory trees lay across his grass, reaching almost to the garden chairs and untouched tea, daintily prepared for two. On a stage so small it was impossible to ignore the most conspicuous feature of the scene. Weg guessed the combination and accepted facts, but she felt less intrusive taking the gala bull by its horns.

"Tea for two! So you were expecting me? How jolly of you, old thing! I don't remember promising to come, but I am deeply touched by this ovation."

Katie's laugh from the open door relieved the situation.

Weg swung on her, mock furious. "Why didn't you tell me he was giving a party, girl?"

"Shure, and it's yourself I thought he would be expecting," cried the housekeeper, her Irish wit ever ready for self-defense, and with a parting gurgle disappeared into the back regions.

Mosely recovered speech. "I am extremely g-glad you dropped in, Miss Weg. Your aunt does me the honor to c-come every day about this hour—when tea is over at the rectory, and she is not missed."

"Aunt Letitia! Two teas every afternoon. Good lummy! How does she stretch her sugar ration?"

Arthur smiled. His face, belonging to the regular, superintelligent, academic type when in repose, lighted up beatifically.

"She has mine here," he said, and, taking the leap like a man, added: "As she can have anything or everything of mine she wishes. I think I ought to tell you now I am to be c-congratulated. We can trust you to keep our secret. I have been endeavoring to p-persuade Letitia to announce our engagement, but she is so—apprehensive of your father's attitude."

"What utter rubbish!" cried Weg,

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shaking his hand sincerely. "What business is it of dad's anyhow? He will disapprove of course; I am glad you realize that. He'll make no end of a row. Rotten luck! Why don't you dodge all the fuss and fuming, get off together quietly—elope, and let the news percolate drop by drop?"

"Rather an heroic measure, is it not?"

"Jolly ordinary these days. Marrying in haste and repenting at leisure is served every morning with our early tea. I'm not suggesting you should disguise yourselves as sailors and stow-away to New York, you know, or any of that fashionable moving-picture stuff. Just a simple ceremony between friends. I'll make a bargain with you, Arthur. If you will do something for me now, before aunt Let arrives, I'll break the subject of elopement to her gently but convincingly." He smiled, saying nothing. She glanced around the room. "You seem to have all the books in the world here; have you, by chance, a copy of the American bard?"

"Bliss Carmen?"

"Never heard of the Johnny. No—Longfellow."

The owner ran a loving eye over varied books while talking:

"Poetry for you, Miss Weg, and an elopement for me—we are setting the old order of things by the ears."

When he had found the desired volume he asked: "Shall I look something up for you?"

"It's the one beginning: 'Pandora! Sweet Pandora!'" Weg's voice sounded nervous. She blamed herself for a fool, glad her back was to the window and her face shadowed.

"I believe those words come in the middle somewhere."

His attention concentrated on the matter in hand.

"Let me think—Pandora? Epime-theus." He ran a finger down the index. "Ah, here we have it! 'Sweet Pandora! Dear——'"

"Please!" cried Weg, reaching quickly for the book and giving herself quite away to his astuteness.

Her eyes lingered on the page. She turned it, skimmed to the end, and then read aloud:

"There are ampler realms and spaces,
Where no foot has left its traces."
and closed the covers.

But Mosely knew the text inconveniently well. He laughed aloud and quoted back: "'If to win thee is to hate thee'" with twinkling eyes, thereby putting his guest to the blush.

"Turn about is fair play. When am I to congratulate you?"

The girl shook her curls. "Preliminary canter only," she said with a shrug.

Looking into her host's kindly eyes, it occurred to her he would be a sympathetic and efficient counselor, and she might have tried him then and there had not a sound outside—a jingle and a footfall on the tiles—changed the current of their thoughts.

Weg rounded on her aunt. "Discovered—what? You sly, sly old bird!"

She kissed and hugged her and danced her around and around the room, till the frost of their general embarrassment melted in laughter and tears.

"Where's your ring?" cried the girl, at last releasing her victim and catching the white fingers in her hardy brown ones.

"Arthur has it; we wear it every afternoon, don't we?" Shyness nipped the term of endearment hovering on the spinster's tongue; but she held her hand out, fluttering, coyly eager as a girl, and he, with the most graceful tenderness in the world, drew a sparkling hoop from his pocket, put it in place, and kissed it.

Weg, noting he turned his fiancée's hand palm up for the kiss, felt suddenly reassured about the whole mat-

ter. "He cares for her. He is not after her money," she decided. And mischievously insisted on having the ring off again to peep inside. It was engraved "*Lætitia*," the name being spelled in the Latin way, and their confidant smiled at this academic touch—the scholarly appreciation of meaning.

"Happiness—eh? Well, I hope you get it—you two dears!"

Later on she was moved to lay down the law over the teacups.

"But I am afraid I would not be lucky in eloping," her aunt objected faintly.

"By the living jingo, luck or no luck, I don't see that you have any choice. This is going to jar dad horribly—drive his spine through his skull sort of thing. He will froth at the mouth. There won't be any talk of bridal bouquets, spreading the festive board, and marriage à la mode. Elopement wins at a walk. Brace yourselves, my hearties; it is only a question of how, when, and where."

"Doubtless you know I am booked up for a tramping tour with that American friend of your sister's, Tomlins. Going to show him around the Land's End."

"No! When did you plan it?"

"Oh, a while back. He ran across Staple Inn, or some such corner, and began to think he was not seeing enough of the real England in the real way. He is ridiculously conscientious over his pleasures, but an awfully decent sort at bottom; so, as I was going down to stay with my chum Dalton, at Penzance, I promised to take him on for the holiday—a couple of weeks. We will make sorties to the main points of interest throughout Cornwall, and then the Bones are to pick him up in a motor and continue the good work in the north."

"They have asked Roselle to join them, too," Letitia volunteered, "by wire this morning. She has written, accepting."

The last piece of news left them silent, each to his own thoughts.

"Of course, I could drop out," Arthur said tentatively.

"And upset the apple cart!" Then, remembering his flame for Roselle, Weg veered from family strategy and rattled on: "You mustn't disappoint poor Tomlins, stranger within our gates and so forth; Letitia will need weeks for shopping anyhow. We'll go up to town, old bean, and have a final bust. Do ourselves well. A lot more of those slim short skirts and dashing toques, high heels, and hand-embroidered veils, eh, Arthur? She will have all the accessories and I'll have all the excitement. We'll riot—for I'm going to marry Yum-yum, Yum-yum!"

Her gayety swept them along in its whirl.

"A wedding is always such fun!" cried Letitia.

"And when it's your own it's a beano!" her niece teased. "Let's fix it for the twenty-eighth."

"Sunday?" asked Arthur, consulting his pocket diary.

"The better the day the better the deed! Dad is sure to be golfing, and with Roselle away we won't have a soul to chaperon us. All the boxes shall be packed and strapped by Friday night, and we'll come down for Saturday—a last look around the old digs."

They allowed Weg to plan and settle everything. Not that she was more able than themselves; but she was so obviously in her element.

"Arthur can travel up Saturday, leave him no time for the day-before-funk and all that. But you will have to get a license!"

He regarded her gravely. "Stewart Dalton is bishop's surrogate. If the worst comes to the worst, I might persuade him to issue us a special."

"Good dog!"

They all laughed.

"Then it is understood you two take

the plunge, hand in hand, on Sunday morning, September, the twenty-eighth? Circumventing the head of our house makes life look like a gallop and love one long sweet dream!"

"My dear, I cannot allow you to be so disrespectful to your father——"

"Listen to it! And after his forcing a runaway marriage on her! You ought to be canonized, aunt Let. If that Arthur Mosely doesn't make——"

"Hush, hush! Of course we are going to be happy. Have you not said so yourself? I must go and speak to Katie. I am free to potter about here, you know," she added shyly. And, rising with a musical clash, fluttered away, partly bent on Arthur's comfort, but more to hide her feelings.

"Katie says one's got to lie to dad to live with him," Weg remarked, reverting to her former subject. "But, then, she has only known him recently—since Letitia put the wind up. I suppose you have been told about the general, Arthur?"

"I hazarded a guess—yes. And, aside from my own feelings, I am sincerely glad, for her sake, that alliance did not come off. Appearances lead one to think the old gentleman would have been doomed to disappointment, and I can fancy his temper—'fruity,' to use one of your expressions, under such circumstances."

Weg stared. "Disappointed—in Letitia?"

"Not in your aunt exactly, not in any way that would be her fault, dear soul. If you do not mind my speaking plainly—in her fortune."

"A bit thick," Weg said to herself. She felt it so, from him, immediately after announcing his engagement, and a hint of the thought showed in her glance.

"No offense. Please, Miss Weg, do not misunderstand me. I am simply endeavoring to state facts." He laid aside his cigarette, and, marking his

periods with the forefinger of his right hand on the palm of his left, spoke gravely:

"None of your family seems to realize your aunt cannot continue to swim on the crest of the financial wave now the war is over. I'm a poor business man, I confess; but it does not need a genius to read the writing on the wall. I see her correspondence, and I have worn Twiller-Twisters, with apologies to Letitia, the most uncomfortable footgear ever perpetrated. There will be no demand for them in an open market. Once the government contracts still in hand are finished, we're finished also—down and out."

Weg laughed in the face of disaster. "Right you are! I've tried 'em! Twist-ers were designed to be rationed. Nobody would ever wear the things unless they had to! Does aunt Letitia know? Poor dear, our infidelity would break her heart!"

"Certainly not. Time enough when the crash comes. I trust she may never realize the cause—their limitations." His eyes sparkled. "One can blame a considerable amount on peace, you know. This is my chief reason for hurrying things forward—change—diversion—her mind will be occupied, and she will not feel it so much." He leaned back, blandly amused. "I would not sit by, like a tame cat, and allow you to run my elopement, young lady, unless there was a reason. I know I've been called a dud, but——"

"Not by me, Arthur! When a man's womenfolk apparently are working against him——"

"Thank you, Miss Weg. You do not know how much I have always appreciated your faith in my intentions. But to return to our muttons, or rather our shorn sheep, there is one chance for the factory—to establish new machinery and turn out regular lines of knitted goods. It means reorganization, competition, push, snap, go. A fine oppor-

tunity for a hustler. I do not perceive how Miss Rothwell is going to accomplish so radical a change. She is totally ignorant of the hosiery business; tolerates an incompetent old fogey at the works, and me here; she does not know how to set about finding a smart manager; does not know what qualities to look for; does not even realize she needs one. Your father would naturally be her adviser, but—ahem—we are all unpractical people."

Weg was sunk in deep thought after this speech. Relative values seemed to be jumping about like a jack-in-the-box. With every word their family prospects dropped, and Arthur Mosely's stock went up. In spite of his self-depreciation he was awake enough to see the indications of a deluge before its actual cloud-burst. He wanted to marry Letitia and shield her from the brunt of the storm—so much saved.

"Between the devil and the deep blue sea, eh? She hasn't an earthly!"

"Not so bad as that, Miss Weg; last week your aunt received a cash offer for the whole concern as it stands. Not a large offer, but the amount, safely invested, would insure her comfort for the remainder of her life. I feel you agree with me—her comfort is the main issue. Of course she laughed at it. But when we have broken the ice we may be able to do something on those lines."

The word comfort painted another picture for Weg. She saw her father and Roselle living on the fat of the land, doing nothing—absolutely nothing—thinking of no one but themselves. The idea revolted her. She figured roughly how much aunt Letitia might have laid away, in war loan, if she had not been running an establishment during three expensive years. And the blast of scornful wrath pent in her soul burst forth:

"Advise her to accept it, Arthur. Insist on her accepting that chance. Leti-

tia's comfort certainly is the only thing that counts—the rest of us must sink or swim. In England to-day it's every man for himself and the devil take the hindermost."

Arthur nodded his head. "This was a good sound offer."

"Don't tell me it's from Draper!" cried Weg, throwing up her hands in mock amazement, shattering his solemnity.

When they had had their laugh out he said whimsically: "I want you to know I am not counting on loafing on Letitia's hoard. The publishers say I have a knack, one may get to the real stuff some day; but at present I am working on a little camera fodder—vivid detective tales, mysteries, romances, and so forth. They pay promptly."

Weg raised her eyebrows, taking stock of his unimpressive personality afresh. She realized for him this work must be regarded in the light of sacrifice; yet he made the fact no more than a bow to necessities' yoke. Common sense had always appealed to her. She spoke warmly:

"Thanks, Arthur. It is jolly of you to confide in me, and I'm with you. We each have our own side of this new problem. The future looks like what a friend of mine calls 'dry sledging'; there will be ructions on all scores; but I'm with you and aunt Let every time."

"If I could help you with your puzzle, Miss Weg. Can I?" he asked diffidently. "One does not wish to intrude on your private affairs—"

The girl hesitated, reached for a cigarette, took her time about lighting it, and finally decided to speak:

"Suppose you were interested in a certain person and her interests—a jolly person, ornament to society and so forth—but a hungry bird; and not particularly interested in another person and his interests. So you carried your

unhooded falcon forth and let her pounce on the game. In other words, you introduced the two, tucked them under the same lap robe, and started them on a joy ride together, hoping to assist fate. And they took to it like ducks to water—always remaining, however, a hungry bird and its prey. And suppose afterward you grew friendly with the man; came to have his interests at heart also, as much as the other's perhaps, but in a different way. And he showed you he cared till the situation had symptoms of being twin joy rides—a sort of neck-and-neck race. And there was a secret which, if known, would set everything right by knocking your own chariot out; only the first party couldn't tell it on honor, and you mustn't tell it because of a promise rashly made. Then, later, complications cropped up—things you couldn't tell on honor, and the other person wouldn't tell. Oh, I say, this is an awful jumble!"

Mosely's face registered intelligent interest, possibly a trifle more intelligent than was justified, but Weg did not observe him. Her cigarette had burned out, a sure sign of mental perturbation. She threw it away and lighted another.

"I feel a predestined traitor to his friendship; but I can't go back on her, can I?"

He pondered. "I do not quite follow it, but, from what you say, I think you must give the other girl a fair field; even a falcon has admirable qualities. In these delicate questions the balance of one's nice discrimination is apt to be upset by personal feelings. Broad action is easiest and best. Withdraw—there can be no race unless you enter."

"It isn't that!" cried Weg. "I'm scratched. But I haven't told you all. Suppose you found out, even as a hungry bird, she wasn't playing the game—not straight, aboveboard. Ugly facts

came to your knowledge, absolute cold facts, evidence of your own eyes and ears. There's the devil to pay, what?"

She broke off abruptly, hating herself as she saw understanding sweep with a tide of red embarrassment over his face, and felt her own flaming to match it. Useless to curse indiscretion. When a man has sincerely fallen in love and out of love with a woman, he knows that woman's character.

They waited, horrified, silent, shrinking from mutual knowledge, till Letitia's hand on the door forced a pretense of natural talk.

"Caesar's maxim—do nothing," murmured Arthur. "As true as it is old."

Weg made a supreme effort. "Truer," she said, springing out of her chair and smiling at her aunt. "Here's company and I'm away. Don't want to be called a chaperon, or third person, or gooseberry, or whatever it is you two would find me. Pip-pip! See you at dinner. And hurrah for the twenty-eighth!"

CHAPTER X.

About this time the briny disadvantages of foreign travel commenced to rub themselves into several chafed spots on Tomlins' sensitive appreciation. Acute nostalgia, added to the August sun, vastly increased London's noise and dirt and gaunt unfriendliness. He found himself adrift, hopelessly on the outside of his circle. The Bones were packing for a dash to Dinard, and he had not been bidden to accompany them. He would not have gone, but still the omission smarted. Lady Maltravers' house was closed, and Roselle had vanished, regretfully, he fancied. She had been kind to him again since their general upset over neglected engagements, but at the moment she was gone.

An invitation to the rectory for later clashed with his walking trip, and such was the steadfastness of honorable habit he felt obliged to carry out the first

engagement, though the prospect left him cold. Sight-seeing began to pall. He liked Mosely; he would enjoy the outing, of course, when it came; but at present he wanted to get ahead with other matters—and the summer looked like separation. Cornelius did not know that Bella, thoroughly repentant of her unfounded suspicions, had wired Roselle to join them on their motor tour.

A girl with brown hair and golden eyes, as he believed, had dropped him suddenly, completely. The very day after the last day she had snipped their budding affair off close, with a polite note to the effect that, having forfeited her job, there would be no more free afternoons; for she could not expect to find another of the same nature, and meanwhile would be busy searching.

He looked in vain for an address or an inkling of her whereabouts, and bolstered up his courage with the thought that she could always find him. An idea in the end adding insult to injury, for she made no advances.

Spigley alone saved him from actual searches. The style of Weg's note—he had just read it for the *n*th time—aroused him to an orgy of enthusiasm.

"A working girl, mind you. And that girl can do every darned thing, useful and ornamental. Drives a car, pilots an *aéroplane*, washes dishes, writes a stunning hand, dresses like a queen, earns her own living in a dozen ways; punts, swims, rides—why, she's got the *bon ton* skinned a mile!"

"Beg pardon, sir, but what makes you think she is a working girl?"

"Pooley Street. Sure thing—she was regularly one of them."

"I would not put too much trust in appearances, sir. The car and the *aéroplane* might be learned in war work; but, if you'll excuse me, sir, no honest working girl in London rides."

"She said she rode," Cornelius replied doggedly. He loved the vision of her mounted and would not yield it.

Spigley shook his white head. "Then she is other than she seems. I'd go a bit careful, sir, the women are up to their tricks. It's wonderful smart they are these days, and there are all sorts about."

Thus did the moon and stars fall out of heaven. Cornelius read Weg's note again, phrased like a society woman's, and thought had she been deceiving him. Swift mistrust swamped his belief. Instead of seeing her charms, he pondered her game. Trifles flashed to memory, all going to prove Spigley's words. A frill, a flirt she might be, putting up an idiot play—taking a rise out of him and Pooley Street. A professional detective, perhaps, about her business there—loitering on the river for a day's fun. If so, and this seemed the most innocent of many possible interpretations, what a liar the girl was!

Cornelius found himself in a reflective mood, and the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral beckoned him. He was hot; the day was stifling; its gallery promised a breeze. A bit of an extra pull—and then peace, with London spread below. Smiling, he paid his sixpence, and set foot on the winding stair.

The hour was late, the time unseasonable, and the place well-nigh deserted; but he heard two persons going up ahead of him. Around and around the spiral they kept on, just out of sight. Laughter floated down; he felt that they were lovers; once he nearly overtook them and the ghost of a kiss, the faintest suggestion of a sound, a wraith of perfume lingering in the air, covered him with confusion. He moved more slowly.

He envied this fellow in front his cool nerve. A soldier probably, taking his girl to the whispering gallery. What amorous nothings would they murmur to each other behind the iron grille. Generously Cornelius left them the field. He had counted on breaking his climb at that point, but was the last chap

in the world to hamper love's young dream. With a fine sense of delicacy he hung back, so that they might leave the little corridor before he entered it, and turned his head away when passing the gallery door.

Like a hero he plunged on up the corkscrew steps leading to the stone gallery.

Emerging into fresh air, Tomlins was glad to remove his hat and mop his sweating brow. A young wind caught the unsecured ends of his tie and flapped them about. Delicious! He crossed to the giant balustrade, and, leaning through one of its openings, sucked up the welcome breeze.

Now coming down from the stone gallery proves a much more troublesome feat than going up—any doubting Thomas is welcome to try for himself. Ascending is merely a question of breath; descending a nice affair of balance and worn stone steps. Cornelius was no good on heights or ships; he was too big for this place, and had to carry his head bent forward like a duck entering a barn door. He reached the lower part of the spiral stair, feeling as dizzy as a well-spun top; staggered through the arch to the whispering gallery; dropped on its circular seat; and leaned back against the shelving wall with closed eyes and whirling senses.

At once he was conscious of murmuring voices borne to him from the gallery's farther side.

"Those lovers," he remembered vaguely, without changing his position.

The world was righting itself slowly in his swimming brain. He could bear to open his eyes; his faculties grew more alert.

Cornelius heard first a man's and woman's voices mingling, and laughter, subdued but unmistakably gay—rather shocking in the echoes of a dome dedicated to prayer. Then followed another ghost of a kiss, with sweet flirt-

tatious mirth. Cornelius stirred uncomfortably. The feeling of nausea had not disappeared entirely. He dared not move.

"And the next one?" asked a manly voice.

"Here it is," she answered, nothing loath.

Preceded by a sound of rustling paper, the male voice read aloud:

"One evening gown, twenty guineas."

"That sea-green—the one you admired so much," she explained.

"Worth forty any time! Look here, let's cut this out. If I may do myself the honor of putting a little deposit in your bank account?"

"You are a dear!" she murmured. A slight, scuffling movement followed. "But I must insist on your seeing them all." Defensive the whisper now.

So she would rather read accounts than be kissed—yet she submitted to being kissed! The idea struck horror into Cornelius. Did not the man, he wondered, see through her pretended affection?

"I'm sure she's lovely; she must be to blind him like that. Poor fish!" Cornelius was still a little dazed.

"It is simply too awful for a few gloves and stockings; I am really rather ashamed!"

"I wish you could see Bella's bills, my dear!" her companion chuckled. The osculation which followed might be called profound.

Cornelius Tomlins did not heed it. Hope shriveled from his breast. In a moment he sat erect, stunned. Subconsciously he had known that husky voice was familiar, even as it echoed around the semicircle. He ventured a cautious glance through the iron railings, making assurance doubly sure. The sun shone on them, its golden beams illuminating impartially the opposite wall, Albert Bones' uncovered head, the girl's honey-colored hair, and their nefarious trade.

Love!

Cornelius rose and slunk from the presence. Outside, he laughed ironically.

Down and down, one slow step at a time, he proceeded into the depths of disillusionment. He skirted the pool of shadows flying under the dome, and shrank from the rap of his own footsteps retreating down the tessellated nave. So much did her shame obsess him Cornelius behaved almost like a culprit—fleeing from it.

Once safe outside the great cathedral, he jammed his hat hard on his head and bolted.

Roselle! Who would have thought it of an English lady! He knew now he had never trusted her. His guardian-angel instinct had surely warned him, and he had spurned the warning. It was pride that suffered. Not sorrow, but an immense relief left him breathless. With old Bones, too!

In all the weltering emotion relief knelled loudest—for he was relieved, though hardly yet aware of the condition. That ultimatum about living in America had shrieked his active doubts. He was upset also—scandalously upset. He hated Roselle—the girl who had hypnotized him—all girls! Black bitterness surged tidal. Quite enough to blot her out completely, with some left over for others. Curse women, anyway!

He dashed into Cheapside unrestrained, and wildly leaped on a bus, a crowded, moving motor bus, which he would never have had the nerve to do in a sane moment, finding himself on the top of it before he knew where he was.

CHAPTER XI.

Commonplace sights and sounds have the power to soothe. Gradually Cornelius regained his mental poise and took stock of his surroundings. When the ghostly façade of Staple Inn loomed

up, offering sanctuary to his jangled nerves, he signaled the bus, waited for it to stop outright at the next corner, climbed down, and walked back.

Passing through the archway to its magic spell, the silent close at once mitigated his unbelief. He thought of her who had first brought him here, certain she could be no charlatan. Doubtless she had good reasons for withdrawing from his companionship. Meekness succeeded indignation. What was he—Tomlins of Sue Luck City—that any girl should hunt him up? Faith in her nobility induced a melancholy regret that he had not traced her. He blamed Spigley for ill advice, and himself for listening to it; but all as one removed, feeling the whole thing did not greatly matter.

There, however the mood suffered interruption. For how was he going to get inside the paling? His dearest desire to bathe a lacerated soul in silence could not prevail against cast iron; and he had never learned the secret of the lock.

He looked around, but saw no means. Cornelius rattled the gate gingerly, then harshly, shrinking from the blasphemous noise. His nerves were taut, so that when a voice hailed him he started.

There, halfway across his garden, sat the girl, Weg, a newspaper spread on her knees. She was smiling.

"The spring is underneath. Run your fingers along, pressing upward."

Cornelius, obeying her commands, entered.

Weg grasped the intruder's hand and shook it with an abrupt, boyish frankness calculated to mock both the worst and best of his sentimental maunderings. Tomlins refused to doubt her, but his ill humor longed to reproach. The words would not come. She was at her sprightliest, and while language poured around, he knew himself clay in the hands of the potter.

"What ho! What luck! We meet

again and at the happy moment when it matters. Here sits a damsel in distress reading pledged promise of proud, puissant prince." She waved the paper. "One pounds on her portcullis with unseemly din, and as she glances from the folio to cuss the foe—behold, his very self! Get me, bud! It takes a bit of looking for."

"You wanted to see me?" questioned the young man, dazed by her flowery speech. A trip-hammer pulse approved his simple interpretation of the parable.

"Quite. Since the last editions I have been running around in circles, and calling up Pink's Hotel."

Gratification devoured her through heavy lenses.

"About this." She tapped her copy of the *Daily Express* in a businesslike way; and Tomlins' spirits fell to zero.

Seating himself beside her he pretended dullness; and thrilled as she leaned nearer, pointing out the paragraph. But fervently though he may wish to, an American cannot long feign ignorance of the mother tongue. Cornelius read and grinned.

"Great Scott!"

It was a racy advertisement which the poet in him had written and the lawyer approved. He felt rather self-complacent over the thing as a neat turn; in spite of Bones calling it a rich man's indulgence, and saying it would bring no business.

WHITEHALL FLAPPERS—Everybody has abused or made fun of you—even the newspapers. If, as they say, you do not know anything, except making tea, we will teach you an entirely new, fascinating line of work. The "Drop and Carry One" machine for hand embroidery is an ingenious, new, and simple device to make embroidery quickly, easily, and without eye strain. We will teach you without charge how to use it and how to make considerable money at home. When exceptionally efficient we will find you a position as demonstrator in the large stores. The "Drop and Carry One" is easy to sell; everybody will eventually use it in his home—

"Well, do you approve? The press did not. *Morning Post* and dignity-dividenders refused it. Gummed my game too! I wanted the invitation printed large on every daily sheet. No use in that sort of 'ad' unless you spread yourself over it."

She laughed. "Don't be downhearted. I do more than approve—I apply."

Cornelius stared. "Are you serious?"

"As a Quaker meeting—sunk to the ears." Weg's face all at once grew convincingly grave. "It is this way: I've been dancing a light fantastic with the fashionable pet, 'frenzied finance,' making myself conspicuous in the local spotlight; dashing on the scene and dashing off; playing at work with a comfortable rooftop as shelter between acts. Now the family fortune has crocked up altogether, and I've got to make good; find a sit; prove, not preach, the gospel of equality, emancipation, earning power and so forth. This little screed of yours promises all those excellent things plus variety—the butter on our daily bread—and I thought if you were good enough to rally round, there might be something doing—what?"

"Is that the straight goods or fibs? Are you bluffing?"

Tomlins' question took Weg aback. She crimsoned with remembrance of half truths; grabbed her veracity with both hands and answered simply.

"I'm afraid I have bluffed you a bit. Pooley Street was make-believe, part of the light fantastic. But I'm not guilty of any whoppers. Every word you were told is true—only I left a lot out."

Her head drooped. Confession is least palatable to pride and independence. She regarded her companion from under lowered eyelids, and catching that glance, Cornelius turned giddy.

"The hard-luck story related about

our place and dad is true, though I zig-zagged among the facts. The house was sold, crash without credit, don't you know, mortgaged to the hilt and what-not. But my father isn't a farmer, as you gathered, he is a colonel, retired, and——"

"Holy cats! If I'm not a dumbhead! The worst kind of a dumb fool!"

Weg lost her humility in sheer surprise. She sat up fearing, for a moment, the wild youth was about to embrace her. He looked like embracing.

"How frightfully unexpected these Americans are! Always bursting out all over the place!"

"That gypsy, you know—of course you don't—a gypsy woman, perfect wizard, down in Hertfordshire, told me my fortune a while back. She said I was going to marry a colonel's daughter. I know a colonel's daughter—a belle. I was thinking about her at the time, and the prophecy made me so certain, I just naturally shut my mind against every other girl. What a ding-blasted idiot! Acting as if there was only one retired colonel in the whole of England!"

Weg laughed. She granted that silly notion more than its share of humor, glad to hide her feelings, even hysterically. By implication his last speech elated and embarrassed her in equal parts. She understood too thoroughly the scene he re-created: the gypsy's tent, the gypsy, her own happy idea of a family boost. Fibs, bluffing! What an unconscionable lot of iniquity they had handed out to this poor boy! Figuratively she became a worm. Her spirit crawled, abasing itself in regret, while she watched his silence narrowly, afraid to speak. Whichever way the cat jumped things seemed sure to break wrong for Roselle.

"Then you are a lady!" he exclaimed, at last. "Spigley was right!"

This time astonishment nearly betrayed Weg. "Spigley—who is he?"

"The factotum at Pink's." Tomlins

noted her recoil and misconstrued it. He rushed into spoken apology.

"Please forgive me. Do! I shouldn't have said that—I shouldn't have said it in that bald way. Of course you are a lady to me always—it's only England upsets one so! They draw such a black mark here between the folks who do things and those who don't. It was Spigley put me off from first to last. He allowed no working girl in London could ride."

They had discussed her then. Had Spigley told? Fear and relief battled within. She could not lose sight of the thought that open confession would mean smooth water for Roselle, would settle all rivalry—the best thing to happen, of course, the honorable thing. But for once joy did not bound at honor's call. She hated, more and more, the idea of Roselle and Tomlins together. He was too honest, too fine.

"But I do work," she heard her voice objecting weakly. "Didn't he know?"

"What? About you? He only knew what I told him, and I can't remember that I mentioned any names."

In his flash of dignity Weg's salvage scheme for Roselle toppled; and she was immediately ashamed to realize how lukewarm an admiration its vision prompted. Less than ever prepared to lead the conversation, she waited, silent.

Cornelius was sunk in his own thoughts. Events were moving too fast for him. His soul felt tired. Suddenly he made a resolve, and emotion naturally broke out in words.

"I'm going home! I'm homesick—that's what's wrong with me, just plain homesick! I'm going back to America by the first boat!"

"Back to the alfalfa and the alkali?" said Weg lightly, but with a cold heart. Freshly awakened to her sister's interests, she knew nothing could have been worse than this flare for patriotism—whether he left Roselle, or married her and dragged her along.

"Grass and the desert, yes," said Cornelius, shooting a quick glance at her. "They're not twins, you understand, in spite of their first letters, only forty-second cousins. But they spell the West. You've got its number all right, and a darned good number too! I'm going back to it—God's own unsettled country, where there's room to breathe, and stretch, and move around without tripping over other people!"

His words fell like dull blows on the girl's hearing. Having no thought or will for conversation, she snatched at the spoils of another's fancy to fill the pause; reciting idly the first apt thing which came to mind:

"There are ampler realms and spaces
Where no foot has left its traces—"

Weg intended no particular effect. But the charm of words familiarly dear constrained Tomlins to finish the stanza; and it is impossible for a man to utter, even unconsciously, the wish nearest his heart, without putting a wealth of meaning into it.

"Let us turn and wander thither."

The plural rounded on Cornelius and stunned him. His soul leaped. All the blood in his veins rushed to his extremities. For one overpowering moment he believed he had proposed—and that when not quite intending to do so. How easy it had been! He had just slipped over the edge, as smooth as the brow of Niagara Falls. How perilously easy! The youth's intentions toward Weg had been honorable, but indefinite. Brought suddenly face to face with this strange result he expelled a long breath and waited.

Weg's color flowed from keenest mortification. She had given herself away, in airily quoting a foreign couplet, and knew it. She had been reading up—how else explain the fact?—since those lines, the whole poem, had been unfamiliar on the river. Tomlins

judged correctly this woman's hours and humors far too full for dallying with things outside her interest. And she had taken notice, had cared to learn his poet.

Perhaps he hadn't—perhaps she wouldn't— No. Certainly she was not going to take it that way. Oh, if only she had!" I'll never be able to do the stunt again," he groaned, inwardly torn by joys and fiercest disappointment.

"What is it?" Weg gasped.

Cornelius drove his hands deep into his pockets, sticking his legs out, an old familiar attitude. He fought for control with muscular tension. His voice grated harshly.

"That girl—she's made a perfect fool of me!"

Weg actually laughed. "What girl?" she asked, careless of the reply. His pent feelings amused her. "Wounded vanity, was it then, at the bottom of his homesickness?" She would like to have said this, but refrained. Watching him draw himself together and sit erect, braced, she added "restlessness" and "dumps" to the list of his symptoms; wished he would not confess to her; and wondered, in a flash of indignation, what her sister had been doing now. Couldn't she stop wounding the boy, even when she was safe in Hertfordshire? The maid of mystery, that suggested intrigue of his past, recurred to mind.

"What girl?" she asked again curiously.

"The girl I had decided to marry, the colonel's daughter. I only found out an hour ago. She's no good!"

Recollected shame for her actions swamped him. Like a bent reed he dropped his face into his hands.

Weg's eyes dilated. "No good." He used grim words. Where did they lead? What had he found out? She realized how deadly serious the man had been from start to finish, while they were making polite game of him.

And now he knew—how much? The scene at the Savoy? Albert Bones would never tell, not the girl's name! Had Roselle been guilty of any other rottenness? Her chances lay shattered, ruined, done. One had only to look at Tomlins to know it. Little fool! That is if she cared about his millions.

Swiftly Weg's mood changed. She felt glad, relieved, buoyant, utterly childish. She longed to skip, to toss up her hat, to shout, to throw her arms around Cornelius and congratulate him, there where he sat on the bench bowed down with woe, telling him how jolly well he was out of it. Then she remembered his woe was their woe—a new brand, and realized, whatever his grievance, she did not want to hear it. She shirked the responsibility of family crime. Noiselessly she rose from her seat, cast a single comprehensive glance at the hunched shoulders—a glance in which concern, affection, joy, sympathy, and regret were wonderfully mingled—and stole quietly away.

When Cornelius raised his head the girl, Weg, was gone.

CHAPTER XII.

It is highly probable that September the twenty-seventh, 1919, will live in the memory of the English people almost as long as that conclusive second of August, five years earlier. Indeed, to some, particularly to those quartered in and about London, its recollection will bring even keener pangs, as its moment pinched the individual more directly. For in the annals of the thrifty-conscientious those morning hours witnessed inaugural forced marches over flints and flagstones. Clerks trudging to their office talked enviously of "minimum wage," and wondered what the railroad blighters wanted. Indignant matrons and harassed ministers worried about food. The taxi owners, it was whispered, were sure to come out. Men

swore to back the government, whether or no. Everybody seconded his neighbor in hoping Lloyd George would stand pat, and expressing a general heroic willingness toward personal sacrifice.

Barbers plodding to their chairs from rural ambush and generals in mufti jostled each other on the street corners. For the one there would be khaki and a military car, for the other blisters; but September twenty-seventh saw all men equal—free to walk, and frantically doing it.

Motor traffic went up head. Exhausted crowds unanimously spared breath to cheer the milk parade; men and women mustered eager for the fray.

"If they had done this to us before the war, they'd have done something!" ran the derisive slogan from self-reliant millions, as the nation rallied to relief of its own plight; smiled at fatigue; scrambled good-naturedly; ate buns on railroad platforms; slept where it dropped and grinned and bore it.

Not one soul in all the seething land was up against things worse than Letitia Rothwell.

Aunt and niece had returned home Friday night as Weg had planned. Rumors of disaster were already in the air, but packing and strapping and labeling boxes, and placing them in Spigley's charge, had fully occupied their minds. Only on Saturday, at breakfast, when the colonel swore over a telegram postponing a foursome, did the truth crash home.

Letitia took it standing; her brother's presence forbade outcry. As a family they congratulated Roselle on having joined the Boneses a day ahead.

"Though I could have fooled her up in the runabout," Weg said.

Her father glared. "Don't suppose, young lady, that I am going to miss my golf on account of the outrageous demands of these infernal strikers. It is

bad enough to be reduced to playing three—I shall need the car as usual." With that the little, round man stalked from the room as majestically as his paunch allowed.

"Bowwow-wow!" mimicked Weg, and turned to hearten her aunt, who for once was too upset to be shocked.

"Don't worry, old dear, Arthur will trickle up by motor; sure to meet you at the altar rail and so forth. This is our last chance to enjoy your liberty, and we mustn't gloom the memory."

"I won't. He will," assented Letitia, but without conviction. Her words rang hollow even then.

At ten o'clock they received his first telegram: "Train promised by noon, do not worry, will make it some way."

"What did I tell you!" chortled Weg. "He's sure to turn up; and he forbids you to worry, so be a good dear and don't."

"I won't. He will," reiterated the spinster in toneless resignation. At eleven-thirty the second message arrived: "Train postponed till four o'clock."

Weg's comfort now assumed the touch defiant of one who wages battle against fate. Inaction chafed her. By rights she ought to have been out volunteering for service. Draper had handed over his whole garage to the government. They were short of drivers. This was a great national emergency—a crisis not to be ignored. But it was also a lively emergency for her aunt, and as she had herself arranged the wedding and even set the date, she felt in honor bound to stick it, holding the lovers' hands till well united. "Plenty of time to get into the scrimmage later," she reassured herself. "London is preparing for a long siege."

At four o'clock they received word that every motor in Penzance was chartered. Miss Rothwell's lips trembled, but all she said was: "I knew I'd be unlucky in eloping."

Weg felt the gently implied reproach. "Hang it all! If Draper hadn't given away the garage, and dad, hogged the runabout, I could drive you down to him. At a pinch we'd do it yet."

"It is very good of you to offer, dear." Letitia's voice dripped tears.

They ate a sodden tea and shortly after the bride took to her bed.

Mosely's final telegram, "Train positively leaving at midnight," arrived in Hertfordshire too late for delivery, so without a ray of hope his fiancée faced her lone vigil. Weg's cheery chatter spattered the gloom like raindrops falling on a tank—and with as much effect!

"My precious lamb, this isn't a public disgrace like having to put off St. George's, Hanover Square. What difference does it make whether you go to the registry office Monday or Tuesday? He'll be up Tuesday at the very latest. What does an hour more or less matter?"

"If you had waited nearly fifty years for matrimony you wouldn't talk so glibly of an hour more or less. I have a feeling, Weg, that I am going to die an old maid after all—and they will put 'spinster' on my tombstone!" Letitia wept.

"Nonsense! Arthur is staunch as—the habeas corpus," cried Weg, casting about rather wildly for something left to swear by. She hardly knew whether to encourage with laughter, or sympathize in tears.

"He has the ring in his pocket—he wrote me about it; and he can get a license any time from that Reverend Dalton. Suppose he grew impatient and married somebody else."

"You poor old bean! You haven't a shred of confidence left in mankind, have you? And I don't wonder at it, considering dad and General George! I say, do buck up. It's a plot in a book. You and Arthur are marooned on separate islands, don't you know? Just now

the signals read 'Napoo!', but—but there must be some means of communication between Cornwall and London—and we have—they have got to find it. Tomlins is with him. I have faith in Cornelius Tomlins. He's the sort of quiet, steady, plodding chap who always gets what he's after."

Weg gathered the weeping figure into her arms and wracked her brains for solace. She tried distraction. "Dry your eyes, old sweetie, and fuss up for dinner; or dad will be asking questions, ferreting out our secrets—what?"

Letitia negated the thought as though it did not matter.

Weg, at her wit's end, left Letitia prone, pacing to and fro, while tears soaked the pillow. She was willing, eager to do anything for the poor soul, but without a notion of what to do. And then help came from the most unexpected quarter. Her five-mile walk over a Brussels rug was interrupted by a nervous tap, tap, tap.

Letitia stopped her sniffing, and Weg opened the door.

Draper, oozing respect and delicate sympathy, stood without. "There's an airman down below, miss, asking for petrol. Shall I give it to him?"

Weg's interest sprang alive. "Air force or civvi? Where from? He can't go to-night—it's dusk already! But, of course, he can have petrol, mayn't he, aunt Let?"

Miss Rothwell mumbled assent and pricked her ears to the girl's storm of questions.

"Where did he come down, Draper? I thought I heard a plane just now. I must go out and see it. He'll need some help in starting—but no, he cannot go on to-night! Anyhow the village will be with him to a man."

Draper looked very much perturbed. "Unfortunately no, miss. There's been a little haccident—at the sawmill, near Blount's corners."

"Your mill, Draper! I hope you are not liable for damages?"

"Not at all. No, indeed!" A capitalist's indignation rang in his voice. "Some of the village boys fooling with the saw. 'Adn't no sort of business to be about there on Saturday afternoon. If 'e loses 'is arm 'tis 'is own fault, and a lesson to other meddlers!" He calmed himself, recovering his aspirate. "But you see, Miss Weg, the village was practically all down at the mill when this airplane came over. And they are such ordinary things these days, nobody took no notice of it. Least ways that's what the pilot tells me. He dropped in Hitchin's field, quite deserted, with the wood between him and the road. A bit pipped about it 'e is, I'd say. Artful, they are, these airmen—like to make all the sensation they can."

"Draper."

"Yes'm."

Letitia's voice startled both hearers. The butler, who had fallen into easy narrative, made a grab for his wooden respectfulness and managed to adjust it almost as one to the manner born, even in face of his mistress' next demand.

"Come in, and shut the door."

Weg turned, frankly amazed, to see Letitia sitting up on the bed, dabbing her swollen eyes with a lace chemise. She flushed and paled and spoke as a conspirator.

"Did I hear you say that thing was in Hitchin's field with no one near?"

"There was nobody about when he left, ma'am."

"Weg!" cried Letitia, holding out her hands in piteous entreaty. "An aeroplane in the field unguarded—this is our chance!"

"Chance! To steal it, do you mean?"

"Borrow it." corrected the would-be thief.

"My holy aunt!"

Weg did not intend this as apostrophe, but it nearly proved the undoing of

Draper, who was that anomaly, a butler with a sense of humor.

"You're mad!"

"Weg! It will be the adventure of our lives! And oh, my dear, do it for me! As you love me, Weglette!"

Common enough phrases. But consider the pleader's beseeching voice, that toy diminutive, her pathetic eyes, the abandoned disheveled head, the silent witness of those wedding garments strewn all around, and the truly awful human knowledge coiled in her final sentence!

"Could you do it, dear? You have your certificate—but would you be afraid to venture?"

"Afraid!"

Weg threw her head back, laughing; nerves made the laugh an exultant cackle, reminding Draper of a hen with a November egg. Her fingers tingled for the joy-stick; her lungs half burst with longing for a draft of upper-air. And Cornelius Tomlins was in Cornwall!

"Afraid! But my dear good sportsman, how would we get off? One can't go pip-pip, single-handed, in an aeroplane. It isn't like helping oneself to a motor bus out of a garage. And where would we go if we did start? Where would we land? We don't even possess a map!"

"It's as simple as A B C," said aunt Letitia, and scrambled off the bed, ready to demonstrate her splendid faith. "They're in Penzance. Roselle told me they intended to pick Mr. Tomlins up at the Queen's Hotel on Sunday afternoon. Why, Weg, I know Penzance better than Hertfordshire. Your aunts and I spent every summer there for years and years. It wasn't much of a place then. We were sent down with our nurse, and we ran riot on the moors."

"Moors—hm."

"Yes, yes! We can come down on New Mills Moors and catch a couple

of donkeys—there are millions of wild donkeys on the moors—and ride into town——”

“Wild donkeys!” Weg roared. “Oh, you dear, delightful aunt! What odds are offered on our chance of catching one? I see you cramped and seasick, feeling like a corpse, climbing out to hunt the wild ass. You’re branded with the spirit of crusading ancestors, old top.”

Weg had been cogitating the sane question and had come to the same conclusion—why not? “Have you a map, by chance?” she asked. And her aunt snatched at the hint of acquiescence. They exchanged glances, pledging each other to the desperate enterprise, with looks instead of words, and turned on Draper.

That worthy hardly heeded the few short sentences in which Weg sketched the planned elopement. News of Miss Rothwell’s nuptials doubtless struck him breathless in surprise; but he managed to control his feelings and keep a stolid face. His success with the sign and seal of perfect butlerdom was perhaps due to the man having established himself already on a more than friendly footing in Katie’s kitchen and her confidence.

“It’s my opinion Miss Rothwell could do anything,” he said, after Weg had explained the situation step by step and act by act, making her aunt’s wild scheme of flight a glowing possibility.

Letitia’s were the eyes which opened wide. Sheer inspiration had hurled the idea at her, without stopping for practical details. Had she realized that they would need Katie and Draper and others in the plot, it must have died during gestation.

Draper was easily bound over to keep their secret, and Weg answered, in this case, for the loyalty of Ireland.

“That airman’s Irish by his speech.”

“Spiffing! All to the good. We’ll turn him loose in Arthur’s cottage.

Unless the fellow is a human owl, he will hardly expect to wing it after dark. We’ll send a telegram on his account; offer him board and lodging, whisky and whatnot—Katie’s board and Arthur’s lodging! They do themselves well over there. If these heaped sweets don’t tempt him from the path of rectitude——” With sudden interrogation to her allies, “Where is the rest of that sleeping dose Roselle was ordered for her toothache?”

Draper’s face went gray. His enthusiasm, as the plan unfolded, took on a bone chill. He felt like a man entering icy water inch by inch, and no prospect of escape under neck-deep. These high-handed proceedings were all right for Miss Weg, with nothing to lose, but the capitalist quaked.

“Will such extreme measures be necessary, miss?”

“If his nibs has been up for a long flight I’d answer no. It all depends on his mood. Should his soul be satisfied with a full meal, pipe and baccy, feet on the hob, Katie’s conversation, and the prospect of a night between sheets—well and good. But if he’s restless, I’ll attend to him. It’s no use taking risks—the man simply must oversleep himself!”

Jealousy goaded financial dread. “But aren’t you taking risks? Aren’t you going out of the way to invite trouble? If I may make so bold as to mention it, think of the value of the machine—wonderful expensive they are! What if you should have an haccident and smash it up?”

Weg laughed. “Going out of the way to invite trouble! Why, we are taking him by the collar and jerking him in! You’ve got accidents on the brain, Draper. But don’t sound the foghorn; don’t scare off the bride. Nothing will turn me from the scheme now, not if I have to go alone. You two fearfuls make an affirmative. And if there’s any mishap aloft, trust me, it will be

old dad to face the music and cover up the theft."

Her hearers shied at the harsh term.

"Of course we intend to pay the company, if anything happens, and indemnify the pilot."

Letitia's dignity was lost in Weg's shock of remembrance.

"My holy aunt! Where is he? Run, Draper, quickly. The man's been waiting all this time. He'll be as mad as a wet hen if he hasn't cut loose. How careless to leave him lying around! Tell our lad the colonel is out—that is, cannot be found; and you daren't give away petrol in his absence. Send him over to the cottage by the short cut—the little garage can belong to Mr. Mosely for once. Advise him to ask there. Lay it on about dad's temper. Lay it on thick. Say any old thing till I can trickle over and warn Katie."

Weg had barely time to sound her warning before the cottage knocker drubbed and Katie O'Leary, wreathed in smiles, answered its summons.

The waiting girl's knees wobbled, for everything hung on the Irishwoman's ability to pin this stranger down. She returned shortly, laughing.

"Shure. The gossoon's from County Kildare—leave him to me," she whispered, and dove into Arthur's bedroom, from where she produced an old smoking-jacket and a pair of wool-worked slippers, all bulging, familiarly suggestive of a true man's ease.

"I'll be bringing his coat out to air. The way it is ye have warm things for yourself, Miss Wég, ye will be needin' a protection for your aunt."

Weg grinned appreciation of this fine point. "Letitia gets a buckshee ride all right, and I'll certainly leave it to you, Katie! But don't count on making him comfortable too soon. He will be obliged to dodge out and picket his machine. I'm going up there now to have a squint at it; and I'll send down that bottle—harmless stuff. You can put a

nip into his whisky just for luck. But pledge him lightly yourself—remember early to bed. We'll be off about dawn, and you've got to get up, old toad, and operate one of the chocks while Draper pulls the other. Dear life! I wish Hounslow or Hendon could see us start!"

The most serious item in the whole crime still remained unsolved. Weg broke the news to Draper in his pantry.

"How are we going to fill that machine? And where are we to find an expert mechanic able to swing her prop?"

"Can't I do it myself, miss?" cried the butler, ready to walk on his head, rather than introduce outside witness.

"I wouldn't like to leave you with a broken arm, Draper, and besides you will be fully occupied helping to turn her round while she taxies into the wind. No, we must call up your blooming garage. Spate would be just the one—but he will have volunteered?"

"He'd do fine—but he's been at the mill all day." Weg's accomplice wore a troubled frown. He spoke unwillingly. "There is that new hand—I know nothing about him; he's only been on a week; but he seems wonderful close-mouthed, and he's an ex-airman."

Such unprecedented good fortune relieved her last doubt. This was going to be no end of a lark. Her spirits bubbled.

"Right-o! Order him up for special duty. We may as well have all the expert evidence we can when starting. It looks like depending on a donkey at the finish."

That was too much for Draper. Levity jarred his sense of the fitness of things. He dropped his knives with a clatter and turned on her a livid face. "I beg of you to reconsider this mad scheme! It is not safe, Miss Weg. Not—not—" Words failed.

"Give up!" she scoffed. "We are all mad these days—the world's gone

dippy! But don't get into a flat spin. Draper, remember flying is like riding a bicycle. It looks a whole lot harder than it really is. And we're in luck. I've seen his plane, two-seated, center-section tank, and rotary engine. We can make Penzance on our first supply of petrol."

Never, in all their experience of pomp and potentes, had the rectory walls frowned down on such a sight as aunt Letitia's progress to the altar.

In that dramatic hour before dawn, when gray spells day, and dew lies deepest, and autumn's breath tangs with a northern chill, a strange procession filed out from its hinterland. Silent they crossed the drying green, compassed the kitchen garden, and so, by devious ways to shield their plan from chance observance, reached Hitchin's field. Draper walked first like a pillar of cloud. In the night watches he had armed himself with a lantern, and though dusk mocked its flame he clung to it still, a necessary adjunct of conspiracy. The fact of rising hours earlier than his regular time weighted his gloom; and he was not pleased with Katie. Weg followed, a pillar of fire. She just loved it, and could with difficulty restrain her enthusiasm from scorching Draper's back. Next came Letitia; the faithful Irishwoman bringing up their rear.

The bride had dressed herself, according to orders, in her bridal garment. "For we're not carrying any kit along, old thing, and it will be Sunday, just the same, in Cornwall," Weg reminded.

"You may take your toque." She had relented, hurrying to wrap it up at the last minute. Letitia's face in a flying helmet was a scream!

When buying her aunt's trousseau the girl had set herself to sweep Arthur Mosely off his feet. So over the loveliest and smartest of Madame Dolini's

creations, the dear good lady wore a jersey, to pad her out, and on top of that an airman's jacket sternly seamed and buckled, and so much too ample that above her skimpy skirt it lent her the appearance of a bungalow on stilts. One hand she used to hush her jangling chatelaine, which she positively refused to relinquish at this most critical moment of her life; while her other hand held the perishable headgear, and cheek by jowl with its tissue-paper promise, a lordly bunch of carrots—fresh earth still fragrant on their rosy sides.

"Glory be to God! Is it the bridal bouquet you're after carrying?" exclaimed Katie on seeing these.

"Donkeys," hissed Letitia.

Weg and Katie laughed. The party's spirits ran in streaks of light and dark like a marble cake. The bridal mind was steeped in mystery. Emotions loftier than the thought of marriage moved Miss Letitia. She had never before found a personal occasion worthy of Twiller-Twisters. Now she donned a pair, over her boots, and wearing them, in a certain way, proved the *pièce de résistance* of the event.

Under her arm Letitia carried several maps, torn from ancient schoolbooks. Weg, noting the complexity of these, had determined on a simpler guide—the London Southwestern main line and the coast; but the spinster clung to her charts.

"In case we are wrecked, like the other poor chap was, here, in Hitchin's field."

"Wrecked among pilfering savages—what?"

At such unseemly humor! Draper, the dark, turned quite chocolate.

They debouched into a large field hedged from the road by a wood and rising to a crest of turf near the center. As a brisk wind was blowing steadily down this slope, Weg decided to take off from the top of it. Their mechanic had already loosed the plane from her

stakes, and she waited, motionless yet seemingly alert, like a gull resting on a billow. Letitia drew her breath.

"One foot on the wing and one in the body," Weg directed, giving a sprightly example of mounting as she spoke; and Letitia, less nimbly, with many pushes behind and pulls from above, scrambled in.

Solemnly Draper handed up her dressing case, the toque, the carrots, and her trusted maps.

"Ready, old bean?"

"Quite," said the heroic passenger, in a very small voice.

"Contact!" cried the mechanic.

"Contact," answered Weg.

He swung her prop. The engine coughed, buzzed, and subsided.

"Switch off."

"Switch off," repeated the pilot.

"Contact."

"Contact."

He swung again and drew blank.

"Switch off."

"Switch off."

"Contact."

"Contact."

It seemed as though the experts were bent on having all the fun to themselves. Letitia's face turned whiter momentarily. She sniffed.

"Castor oil! Hold your nose," commanded Weg. "We don't want you squeamish before we rise."

"Contact."

"Contact."

So their disheartening game went on. Draper beamed, Katie desponded, and Letitia was frantic with apprehension, before a steady droning rewarded the mechanic's efforts.

He bounded back. Weg waved her hand. The novices pulled out the retarding chocks; with a quiver like a live thing, the aeroplane commenced to move.

Letitia felt no emotion whatever. She was stunned. Barely she heard

Weg's "Cheerio!" her "Steady, old top," above the noisy engine.

The hillcrest opened their view to a glimpse of the sun's sharp rim cutting enlarged horizons.

Suddenly the world seemed to drop from them. There was an instant's need of breath; and then Letitia grew conscious of sailing through shimmering space. But her elation was modified by the smell of lubricating oil. A silly old verse sung in her memory:

"Had I the wings of a little dove,
Oh, far, far away would I fly,
Right to the arms of my true love
And there would I live and die."

She hoped it would not be die. How brave Arthur was going to think her!

At that point castrol triumphed over song and glory. Letitia leaned to the edge to commit an indiscretion in the air, and the shock of an earth so receding bereft her of both stomach and sense.

"Weg!" she whispered sickly.

"Courage, old dear. You're safe as a feather bed. I saw you strapped in myself. It will soon be over! Think of Arthur, on the beach surrounded by mermaids in bathing suits!"

This cruel suggestion, borne back to her on the wings of the wind, acted as a tonic. Letitia pulled herself together, shut her eyes, and clutching the carrots with one hand and her nose with the other and settled for the flight.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was a glorious adventure, but Weg confessed afterward she never felt so relieved as when they made a neat landing on what, according to all indications, ought to have been New Mills Moors—the promised land overflowing with whin and asses!

In her own words: "There we sat, Sunday morning, miles from anywhere, and not a soul in sight except the donkeys."

"Letitia had recovered fortunately. Her face was pasty, but her spirit stout. When we had stretched our cramped muscles and retrieved her bonnet from the bottom of the plane, poor dear, she had thought all the time it was her precious toque she nursed so carefully, I decided the hour had arrived for rounding up man's dumbest friend. Donkeys browsed to right and left of us; donkeys eyed me askance, and, when I ventured a good morning, unprettied, actually cut me—nasty snobs! They took the count of my social turpitude and showed their heels and, for once, I was flagrantly guilty of trailing the swells. I legged it over the landscape in mad pursuit. But what use while we were breakfastless and they had fed? The individual also fights on his stomach. I soon realized the hopeless lack of my rum ration, and returned meekly toward Letitia.

"Imagine my amazement on beholding my honored aunt, in the center of a spellbound circle, doing conjuring tricks with carrots. She had invited two of the spectators onto the platform, so to speak, and tethered them to the aeroplane with the girdle of her wedding dress. When I pushed through the orderly crowd and accosted her, she looked up beaming, but depreciated her own cleverness with that sincere modesty which makes her the dear old trump she is.

"The natives of the heath had rallied round themselves, it seemed; had drawn nearer and nearer, one by one, shyly; at first, timidly, the males egged on by the insatiable curiosity of the females, and their neigheid derisions: Why should a brave buck donkey be afraid of a fowl of the air, no matter how large?

"Personally I was not on the bill, and the beasts suspected me. They began to break away in twos and threes. So I suggested we should mount. Our maps of the district did not show this exact location marked in red ink, you

understand; we had a journey of some miles ahead in the general direction of Penzance.

"Aunt Letitia thereupon stripped off the heavy stockings and the jersey, and adjusted the toque; but she could not be persuaded to leave the airman's jacket behind—for fear it might be stolen!

"I burst out laughing and said, 'Set a thief to catch a thief, eh?' or some such nonsense, and then hastened to apologize, for she seemed hurt, and it was not my part to rub things in, or cloud her marriage morn."

Thus did Weg picture the arrival for Cornelius, later. But we anticipate.

Penzance is not less sleepy on a Sunday morning than other English towns, and few were the inhabitants who rose betimes that week-end. These few rubbed dreams from unbelieving eyes as the strange cavalcade—aviators wearing skirts, perched without saddle cloth or harness on ambulating steeds—rode up the thoroughfare.

"If Arthur's in this place we'll find him at the railway station. He must have lived there yesterday," suggested Weg.

Her opening sentence cast a horrible fear over the bride. What if they had left?

But the worst was not to be. No train had steamed out of Penzance. Mosely was still on the platform and Tomlins, too. The former, wild, young man raged up and down it, tearing his hair and crying imprecations on all engine drivers, stokers, porters, and every other form of malcontent; while his companion sought to calm him.

A chap's looking in late at his own wedding may be explained away as a nervous attack; not to turn up at all points the finger of scorn. And Arthur Mosely was perhaps the one man in England least anxious to invite question of his personal courage. Friendship

will stand a lot—but there are limits. He was thinking of Weg first, of the colonel and his influence—the club he put into his enemies' hands. He realized now it would be impossible for him to reach the altar rail. Cornelius had been thinking the same since midnight. Dogged he strode after Mosely, to and fro, and up and down, unwilling to abandon in this hour of agony; unable to bring the victim to anything like reason. Arthur reduced all arguments to stammers.

"She will marry you on Tuesday," admonished Tomlins. "Quit knocking your own intentions. You didn't ball the thing up on purpose. The whole country's at a standstill! You've struck an accidental snag along with others—don't let it get your goat, man. I'll bet she doesn't expect you, under the circumstances. I'll bet she won't turn up herself—no sane woman would, after your telegrams. Forget it, and come back to the hotel with me."

"Forget it! She never will allow me to forget it—no human woman could. That is the worst of this peculiar mess! You don't know women evidently," stuttered the miserable groom, who did.

Cornelius felt the force of his broadside and relapsed into silence.

Finally he took his comrade by the arm. "What can't be, can't. No train moves out of here this morning, and we both need sleep."

It was obviously true. The rest of the would-be passengers had given up hours before and dribbled home. The only sensible course seemed to follow them. Unresisting Arthur suffered himself to be led out, just as Weg's expedition was crawling into the station yard.

"Holy cats!" exclaimed Cornelius, struck by the general outline of two aviators. "These fellows have original ideas. They make me feel like thirty cents!"

Weg's donkey stopped stock-still and eyed the men; then he shied and bolted.

"At-a-boy!" cried the delighted American, as the rider jumped amid a shower of carrots, reserved for coaxing balky moods, and grabbed the other ass.

"Arthur! Don't you know me?" wailed the frightened bride.

"By the living jingo!"

Mosely covered the separating distance in two leaps. And from the uneasy vantage of the donkey's back, Letitia literally threw herself at his head.

"I've come to be married by aëroplane!" she cried, where a calmer mind would have said by special license.

But if at this crisis the poor lady's speech was mixed and her actions unpremeditated, who among us shall cast the first critical clout? Not the arch-plotters certainly. They cackled altogether like a barnyard full of fowls, while Tomlins stood agape.

He had marked his disappointment in Roselle by resuming the flat hat and bulbous shoes. But his tweeds retained their noble cut, and bagged becomingly. And his eyes, if amazed, were steadfast. Weg thought he looked such a dear, she could easily have followed her aunt's example and thrown her arms about his neck—though from where she stood on the ground it would be a long reach up. She smiled at that idea, and Cornelius smiled back, unable to tear his glance away.

"Pilot?" he asked, trying to place her in the piece. And received a bright nod for reply.

"Ripping morning! We made a record flight—started at sunrise."

Thus nonchalantly she dismissed the hazard of their antics in the air, and chatted on.

"What are we all going to do first? Get married—eat—or sleep?"

Too briskly practical to be counted impertinent, that. She evidently considered herself chargée d'affaires.

Letitia looked at Arthur.

"G-get married," he answered promptly, tucking her hand under his arm.

"Scare up your parson and do it now," murmured Cornelius.

He gazed hard at Weg, wishing it possible that she would take the message to herself. Abandoned as they were to publicity, he made a desperate effort to say things with his eyes. But the provoking girl only laughed.

"We'll scare him if he's scareable!" she cried, flapping her pilot's coat.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Luck is with us!" said Cornelius, at the Queen's Hotel. "Two rooms vacant next to mine. Disappointed week-enders failed to think of coming down by air express. Sea view—not so bad!"

Being luggageless, the party was escorted to their corridor and left, with that scant courtesy so new in England, and there they stood before three doors of unenlivened sameness. They stood upon the order of their going: a bachelor, a maiden, and a married pair. It was an awful moment; till Weg laid hand to knob and Letitia's fingers closed over hers.

"You simply mustn't desert me in these clothes, dearie! I don't know one buckle from another."

The embarrassed bride slipped in ahead of her niece. Weg and Arthur exchanged glances. Arthur laughed and Tomlins blushed. At times he found these English most indelicate!

The door once safely shut, the aviators fell into each other's arms.

"Brought it off! Didn't we, Mrs. Mosely?"

"You perfect angel! I'm married—I'm married—and it's all your fault! At least it's due to you. I'll never forget it—never, never, never, as long as I live!"

"Fault! Did I hear an echo of fam-

ily praise so soon—or did my ears deceive me?"

"Don't!"

"Rubbish, aunt Let! What else will they say, from dad to Ermytrude? I may as well get used to it."

"They'll make it dreadful for you! Oh, my dear, I never thought before how cowardly it is of me to run away with Arthur and leave you in it."

"How mad, and bad, and sad it is—but oh, how it is sweet!" teased Weg. Then noting her aunt's face, took pity. "Leave me in it. Nichevo! You're the one who will be in it briskly when Roselle arrives."

Letitia's chin went up. "Roselle will mind her manners to a married woman. But I'll do anything for you, Weglette, Arthur and I, remember, at any time."

Weg stopped untangling Letitia's chatelaine from sundry buckles.

This idea of friendly invasion by the American worried her on other scores. Thinking of the Savoy fracas, she wondered how Roselle had explained her to Albert Bones, and what Albert had said to his wife. Something quite roundabout, or she misjudged them both. When Bella discovered relationships, the fat would be in the fire. Of course it was as good as over for Roselle with Tomlins—unless he had an unbelievable faculty for forgiveness—a skeleton of family honor, however, remained still decently draped, if she could keep the blast away from it. And maybe Roselle might make it up with Cornelius. Letitia's promise opened vistas of escape. Roselle would curb both tongue and temper before her wealthy hosts; and on Letitia's part Arthur was there to deal with the situation. Better for all concerned that she, Weg, should drop out. She crystallized her scheme in speech.

"Do something for me now, then, and call it square. That Mr. Tomlins does not realize I'm in the family—and I don't want him to. He takes me for a

sort of lady pilot hired to bring you down. Please let him think it. I am a lady, so the wedding breakfast passes, but leave me on the outside this afternoon. I won't be bored, I promise you. I'll play around the beach."

"Leave you out, dear Weg. It will spoil everything!"

"I'd rather not be introduced to Bella Bones," owned Weg, forced to a half truth by her aunt's dismay.

"But why?"

"Reasons. I can't explain, aunt Let. It wouldn't be a sporting thing to do, and so forth. You must trust me. The meeting will be easier all round if I'm away; besides, you promised."

Silenced, but unconvinced, Letitia slept.

When, hours later, the hooting of a motor horn announced the Bones' arrival, she made another protest and was promptly squashed.

"You aren't picking all the roses and leaving me the thorns, you generous goose. I don't have to face Roselle," Weg said.

Then Letitia recollected, fluttering:

"Do you think she will?"

"She will want to," laughed the girl. "But brace up—you have Arthur. And it's worse for her than us, you know. The enemy will be completely taken by surprise. I almost regret not looking in!"

Surprise is indeed a mild, sweet word for Roselle's feelings when Arthur Mosely and his bride burst on her ken. Added to Rothwell indignation, she felt the pangs of a supplanted siren. Afraid to speak, lest she say far, far too much, the tall, graceful blonde kissed her little aunt dutifully and shook her uncle's hand. But it would have taken more than the blight of such a superficial pleasure to attract notice with Bella Bones on the scene.

Bella wallowed. Sentiment was her natural element. Weddings appealed to all her girlish caprice—those instincts

which burst forth from time to time, outraging fashion in garden hats and fichus. To her a bride was still a symbol, marriage a sacrament, an outward and visible sign of the subjugation of mere man. She burred over "dear Miss Rothwell—Mrs. Mosely—I ought to say!" Over her frock, over her ring, over her romantic adventure. "In an aeroplane—fancy! You ought to have your picture taken for the press."

Bella had never set foot near an aerodrome. The entire episode hung hazily in her mental vision. It could be done—that was sufficient. It had been done. A mysterious person, spoken of as "Weg," seemed to have been the god in the machine. Mrs. Bones, unlike her husband, expressed no curiosity to see the pilot. What mattered how—or by whom? The twain had been united, and one more bachelor was snatched from selfish bliss to wear the honors of submission!

Arthur was monopolizing Albert with a long story of the walking tour; and Cornelius had appeared only to disappear immediately. Roselle sat alone, for once completely forgotten, outshone by Letitia! Her gorge rose with every added instant of neglect. She gazed seaward as though idly enjoying the prospect; but she had much to say to Weg.

Her eyes fell, at last, on an ill-assorted pair far down the beach, a small woman and an extremely tall man. She thought she recognized the first, the girl in khaki, and the other—Cornelius! Unbearable infidelity! Spurred from her seat by rage, she rose and sauntered off, outwardly poetic, but inwardly a seething caldron. The easy gait soon changed to a defiant tramping expressive of her mental mood.

As Roselle moved forward, the pygmy figures grew till there was no mistaking their identity. "And what," she asked herself, "could be the meaning of their

attitude?" She looked in vain for that touch of convention hovering between strangers. Side by side they were sitting now, close together, on the same rock. Not lovingly so much as chummy.

"It might have been me and Arthur Mosely," thought the girl, and her thought stung, for in the manless years of war there had been moments. To-day Letitia—*Letitia*—was his wife! And both in love! She gulped that bitter pill.

A sudden keen fear of rivalry swept through her, followed by hot mistrust. A hell-fire of punishment meted to her for her sins! In this life those who persistently outrage the belief of others lose their own happy faculty for confidence. Roselle tormented herself as she crossed the sands, trying to calculate the chances of Weg's having played double. What was to prevent it? she asked. Seeing all value through jealous eyes as through a glass darkly smirched, tinged, lampblackened with the hue of her own falseness. A dozen advantages of his friendship crowded into mind. She remembered their madly circumstanced meeting. Her sister had sworn that a blind business, had promised silence. By the time Roselle reached the pair she was in a towering fury, quite carried away, whirled beyond discretion.

"I suppose you think you have done a fine morning's work!" she cried, abruptly announcing her presence to the astonished couple.

Weg rose. "We can discuss that elsewhere, and at some other time. I suppose you want to talk to Mr. Tomlins."

Without more ado she turned on her heel and left them, generously, if ungraciously, offering Roselle her chance to patch it up.

"Aren't you rather severe, Miss Rothwell? Your aunt's pilot has done a good morning's work. She is a very clever young lady."

"You seem to find Weg interesting, anyhow," sneered Roselle, making a grab for her supremacy. But the elder-sisterly manner, a half and half of condescension and impudent politeness, missed fire.

His voice was crisp. "I do find her interesting, since you mention it."

"I came here to talk to my sister on a family matter—if she chooses to sneak out——" The shrug and the tone said more politely than words, "What business is it of yours, worm?"

"Your sister!"

Such devastating astonishment as Tomlins' could not fail to arrest the most haughty.

"Yes."

"But you told me your sister's name once."

"St. Clair Olivia—we call her Weg."

"I see," said Cornelius flatly. He was commencing to see a number of things as he gazed vacantly over the ocean. Between him and the horizon spun a long film of animated pictures.

"Dumb fool! Hadn't she told him her name was Olivia—in the movies."

The American sighed, then brightened. "I was not such an ass after all, taking it for granted there could be only one retired colonel in England."

Roselle, considering he had gone stark mad, made up her mind to forgive his rudeness. She began to retrace her steps to the hotel; and mechanically Tomlins accompanied her, silent by her side.

He was mentally very busy turning events over; and presently burst out: "If she is your sister, why haven't I met her before, at your home, or—or with the Maltravers, or the Boneses?"

The suggestion held vivid association for Roselle. She was swiftly afraid, and judged it best to make friends where she could at any cost to pride. If Weg joined them she would probably need friends. Besides, to quarrel with Cornelius as an outset to the motor trip

would be ridiculous. So, while resenting his implied reproach, she answered:

"Weg was away. She spends very little time at home. The war has unsettled girls so—particularly in the air force. They have done all sorts of things; gone all sorts of places; associated with terrible people." Bottled up spleen warmed her indignation. "Now they are demobilized they don't care to remain at home—decent society is too dull. I do not believe dad would want Weg home if he knew the facts."

"I've heard a lot of gossip," he admitted. "People are talking of the Pen-nant trial as if it would be a pip-pin; but I don't believe them. The army women aren't half so bad as they are painted."

Caution warned Roselle to drop the hatchet there, and leave it. She was in too precarious a position to quarrel with Weg. But the unparalleled fear of her as a rival, her vile mood, inability to 'take it out' on Tomlins, the temptation to pump him, and a desire to put a finishing spoke in her sister's wheel all egged her forward. Family honor and loyalty, never strong in the girl, were now weakened by intrigue, and she was powerless to check her spite. Almost without volition her tongue ran on.

"It is kind of you, a foreigner, to champion our women, Mr. Tomlins; and, of course, we must always give them the benefit of the doubt; but where there is smoke there is generally fire, don't you think? Those of us who are 'on' expect to hear startling evidence from Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant. The W. R. A. F.'s have taken simply appalling risks—moral risks, I mean. And they seem shameless. Why, even my own sister occupied the spare bed in a strange man's suite at a hotel one night; and then came home and boasted of it—what amounted to boasting. If it got out about her she'd be ruined. Who would marry a girl after that?"

Unconsciously Roselle voiced her

whole philosophy of life in the closing sentence. And Cornelius, seeing through it, his attention humorously diverted to her early Victorian attitude, smiled as he replied:

"The man whose rooms she shared. The one man who would certainly know the girl above reproach."

He blushed, overcome by quick realization of their talk. The barrister in him had argued, subconsciously judging from his own experience—but what an affair to discuss with a lady!

The blush shared Roselle's side glance with his smile. She had wanted to shock him. Always hearing of Americans as overproper, she had thought Cornelius would stammer. But he only smiled complacently. She wondered, momentarily, if Weg had lied about the escapade—stretched it—that would be like her. And the next instant she saw her mistake. Surprise him! Absurd, of course! Did he not know the situation already? He was shamefully gloating.

Roselle's chagrin guessed wrong. Cornelius' mind, as we have said, being diverted into other channels, worked around slowly to the bearings of her tale. All at once its possibilities burst on him.

He swung on her fiercely, demanding:

"Has Spigley at Pink's any connection with your folks?"

"Connection! He was once our butler."

Miss Rothwell, late of Roths' Well, spoke haughtily; but her impersonation of a grande dame fell very flat.

Cornelius took French leave. Jamming his ridiculous hat low on his head, he turned and sprinted wildly in the direction Weg had gone.

Roselle saw her finish, and knew it when she saw it. Remorse sprang upon her in historic form. It tasted salty. Red-eyed, she made her way to the hotel.

CHAPTER XV.

This black and bitter moment in the annals of the family had caught Weg also, poor little girl, seated all alone on a rock, nursing her misery.

There is no climate where the chill of other women's weddings permeates so keenly as in England. Roselle, dethroned from an admirer's heart, though occupied by splendid prospects, had felt the icy breath of this day's doings; for Weg it blew twofold. She had aided nobly, generously, gladly in the capture of Arthur Mosely. But to be called upon to surrender Tomlins—there are bounds to human endurance! The backwash from heroically suppressed temptation surged within her. Longings burst forth in little jets of pity: "Such a good sort!" "So wasted!" "What a crime!" She sighed, forbidding truth to add the tragic sentence: "And none of the three of us happy, either."

Pensively glum she watched the plashing waves. Their ripple, ripple, drowned out the sound of running feet. Cornelius rushed upon her like a spent cyclone.

"Miss Weg! Miss Rothwell!"

Slowly the girl turned, accusing, defensive; trying to hide her recent mood. "So Roselle let the cat out of the bag; told you I was her sister—what?"

"Why ever didn't you tell me yourself? Why did you keep away this afternoon?"

He saw her flush.

"I didn't care to meet the Boneses."

"Then you know about Albert—in St. Paul's?"

"The night at the Savoy—the time I lost my job!"

For a space they bandied damaging evidence even as social amenities, a shuttlecock of conversation; till realizing they were not talking about the same subject, but how each was giving something away, they pulled up short.

Cornelius' indignation overcame all scruples. "And you never told! Naturally—you wouldn't!"

Weg started. Color faded from her cheeks, changed, flooded, deepened. Her voice was small, but her eyes braved his with resolution.

"What has my sister told you, please?"

"About—you know—the room at Pink's." A great tide of desire welled up in Cornelius and spilled itself out in reproach. "Oh, girl! Why didn't you tell me yourself?"

But the worst had a way of steady-ing Weg. Year in, year out, her sex, her nation, had been facing the worst for themselves and others; now she received it calmly to herself. Her tone was dull, inevitable, dead even to resentment.

"So, she told you that—after making me promise not to tell. I always knew Roselle was a female cad."

"You promised not to tell! Why?"

"I promised long before I knew it mattered—before I knew you—and then when I wanted to tell you I was bound. I pretended to be somebody else. Oh, I did hate deceiving you! It is all a rotten mix-up! But it's over now—nothing can be done to undo. I'm sorry. We haven't treated you well. Good-by, Mr. Tomlins. I hope we part friends?"

The girl's eyes glistened suspiciously as she held out her hand.

Tears—and for him, unbelievable! Cornelius clasped the hand in both his own. When zero struck he rushed into action without a backward glance.

"Wait! Don't go. Something can be done—must be done! Weg, I love you. Make the arrangement permanent—marry me. I have loved your little brown head ever since I saw it on my spare pillow. But I was too—too green to recognize the symptoms. I've been running around like a sick mustang trying to find out what ailed me!"

Weg smiled, hesitated, and dropped her eyes. Cornelius' suit was won, though he did not know it.

"Are you sure you would never, never throw the matter up to me?" she asked.

"Holy cats! girl. Why, I admire you for it! Weren't you in the king's uniform—at least you wore it part of the time. Weren't you serving your country? Think of the risks you took of being given away and gossiped about. What loss is an arm or a leg to a man compared to a woman's reputation! I call it a noble risk, a sacrifice. I revered that woman before I knew whether she was old or young, tall or short, plain or pretty. You just ask Spigley how I talked about her!"

And neither did Weg tell him she had been already demobilized.

Seeing she did not withdraw her hands, Cornelius felt he ought to kiss her. He longed madly to take her in his arms and kiss her, all over her brown face and hands, making up for arrears. But theirs was a very public ocean! To hide his embarrassment and curb his ardor, and because, being so fresh at the job, he hardly knew how to proceed the young woman linked his elbow into hers.

"Come on up and tell them all about it now."

"The Boneses!" gasped Weg. "I simply mustn't meet the Boneses! Albert would recognize me—they both would—she'd eat me alive!"

"Shucks! I'd like to see her try it on—with my wife. You'll have to meet them some time. Why, they are our next-door neighbors on the Boulevard in Sue Luck City!"

"I thought you owned a ranch, swarming with long-horned cattle and free Americans in chaps; and were bent on living the simple life."

"We don't—but we will, before you and I are much older!"

"And a brook alive with trout?"

"And an aërodrome to chain us to the world."

"Oh!" Weg stopped, pulling her hand away.

For an instant Cornelius' happiness tottered.

"What—what is it?" he gasped.

"That blasted plane! I've got to get a load of oil and petrol and clear for Hertfordshire."

"No, you don't," he answered masterfully; and seeing her set chin, hastened to capitulate. "Not alone."

"What ho!" cried Weg. "Consider the breeze blowing in the rectory. What price my neck to-morrow?"

Cornelius laughed. "To-morrow! By this time to-morrow you will be an American citizen. Are you going to stay down here for the wedding, or take me back in that machine?"

Her dancing eyes, her incredulous: "Will you?" barely interrupted his excited speech.

"Let's beat it! Leave a letter for your aunt; borrow Albert's car; dash off to the moors and slip away without a word."

"A second elopement in one day is almost too much," murmured Weg, and said no more.

Tomlins had already learned to take a woman's silence for consent. When they had raided the hotel garage, and were bowling along smoothly in Bella Bones' luxurious touring car, auxiliary material following in taxies, Weg eyed her lover gravely.

"The moors aren't nearly so public as the seaside," she said. "That is, if you don't mind donkeys."

Cornelius, squeezing her hand convulsively, issued orders.

"Show a flash of speed, can't you, Jones? There's got to be a whole lot doing before sundown."

And there was.

THE END.



Specifications Submitted

By Berton Braley

WHAT do I want for my guerdon these holidays?

What do I wish as a Christmastide gift?

I want a present to make my days jolly days,

One that will give to my spirits a lift;

Give me a token delicious, desirable,

One which, so far, I have found unacquirable,

Lovely to see, but elusive to gain,

Dreaming and scheming and reaching and groping for,

Cunningly fashioned, a gift I've been hoping for

Only to feel that my efforts were vain.

This is the season for true generosity,

Therefore be liberal, do not refuse,

Somewhat my heart hits a higher velocity

When I consider the gift I would choose,

Priceless and precious beyond any measuring,

Worthy of cherishing, holding, and treasuring;

Greedy, you think me?—well, when you have learned

How for this gift I have sought pertinaciously,

Waited and hungered and fought contumaciously,

Maybe you'll think it's a present I've earned.

What is this gift that I crave so exceedingly?

Listen, dear lady, I'll try to be clear;

Don't you recall what I've asked you for, pleadingly,

Time and again through the length of the year?

Give me a figure that dances on thistle toe,

Two lips to kiss without need for the mistletoe,

Nose that's tip-tilted and eyes that are blue,

Give me, in brief, as reward for my puny verse,

All of the world and the rest of the universe,

What I want, dearest, for Christmas is—YOU!



The Coming of Silky

By

Margaret Belle Houston

ON the lamp-lit platform of the little station stood a group of desperate-looking men, their chaps damp from hard riding, their sombreros drawn down as if to hide their faces. They were waiting for the Boaz County Limited, due to pass that place any time before dawn. Coming toward them five miles away was a man mounted on a clay-colored horse and wearing a silver star beneath his coat.

Coming toward them likewise was the Limited, so called, no doubt, because of its circumscribed capacities for haste. It panted with all its little engine, and seemed now and then to stub its toe and halt for breath.

Back in its coach were a scant half dozen passengers; two cowboys playing poker; an Indian girl, slumped in her blanket, dozing; a nervous gentleman of middle age, and, just across the aisle from him, a girl.

She was a quite pretty girl, despite a sort of shadow in her eyes. Her trimly tailored suit proclaimed her from other parts, as did also her dull-gray spats and the angle of her small black hat. Following the example of her fellow travelers, she had turned back the seat in front of her, making a place for her feet and bags, throwing her fur neckpiece over her ankles. Yet not once had she fallen asleep. The surroundings, for all their monotony, were too

unusual. She had been glad of this train, for she had heard strange tales of its uncertainties. Finding it waiting at Chillicothe, she had exchanged her warm Eastern Pullman for its discomforts with undisguised relief.

But now and then she worried a little about the middle-aged gentleman across the aisle from her.

He, too, had changed trains at Chillicothe, and ever since they had surrendered their tickets to the engineer, who constituted the crew of the Limited, he had been making excursions forward into the baggage car—and perhaps even into the engine—thence to return and sit in detached fashion, staring out his window. She began to wish now that he would speak to her.

And speak to her he presently did after one of his excursions to the front.

"We are due in Pinkerton at three o'clock," he said, stopping by her chair. "Unless, of course, we should tumble over on our back and not be able to kick ourselves onto our feet again."

"I am glad to know," she answered, smiling. "I change cars at Pinkerton."

"Los Angeles?" he asked, and as she nodded,

"Does it mean a great deal to you—connections, I mean?"

"Almost nothing. And—to you?"

"Everything," he answered, sitting down again.

He stared an instant out his window, then turning to her:

"I've been six months in Washington," he explained. "My home's in Honolulu. If I miss connections up the road I miss my boat out of Seattle. If I miss my boat, I don't get home for Christmas. There are youngsters, you understand—and things in my trunk and my pockets. It was a government errand brought me this way. Otherwise I should——"

"You'll make it," said the girl as he paused.

He looked at her.

"You know," he said, "it's an odd thing. My life has not been placid as a whole. I've had my hairbreadth 'scapes and I've known catastrophes of various shapes and sizes. But I never had a premonition until to-night. To-night I have a feeling—it is more than a feeling—that I shall never reach Pinkerton."

He laughed as if embarrassed by his own confession.

"I have a feeling that you will," said the girl.

He rose abruptly, stopped at her chair.

"Are you comfortable?" he asked. "Let me lower the back of your chair. There. Now take off your hat. We've a ride of several hours."

She obeyed him and lay back in the lowered chair. He took her muff from the seat and tucked it beneath her head. Just as she thanked him the little engine stubbed its toe and halted with unprecedented violence. The man went forward and the girl sat up again, looking out the window, wondering if they had reached a settlement or town. There was only the star-lit prairie and a white ribbon of road running parallel with the train.

Perhaps his premonition had been right. Perhaps, indeed, they would none of them reach Pinkerton unless they walked. Then walk she would, for she

had no mind to be sitting here when the snows of this section began. They were late this year, she had heard, but they never failed to come swooping in for Christmas.

She leaned against the pane, wondering what perverse spirit had led her to take this broken trail across the continent. In California, the ever-green, one might indeed forget, but had she hoped for any foredraft of Lethe in these plains? Even as she looked at them, feeling the December wind seep finely through the window crevice, she began to people their barrenness with memory; began to feel the wind as it blew last Christmas through the great black oaks of home; saw the Yule log blazing, the flurry of snow against the windows, the tree with candles twinkling, the mistletoe in the hall; watched again through the frosted pane till they all came riding in; lived again that blustering, laughing, cheering entrance, all in a tingle of snow. "Hello, Sport!" they had hailed her, grabbing her hands. "Hello, Little Sport." Yes, she was bound for parts where the snow would not come to bring the memory of what it had once brought or the thought of what it had promised to bring this year. She would be where there were only roses, poinsettias, palm trees—where it might just as easily be June. There had been no promise bound up with June.

But could they call her "Little Sport" to-night? Would they—running away like this, burning her bridges behind her, dodging and winding across the continent, letting them worry if they would?

Abruptly she drew from the pane. In the white road just before her a man sat, mounted on a clay-colored horse. In the light, shed by the window, she saw the gleam of his yellow slicker, the droop of his wide gray hat, his face hewn in profile against the night. So still he sat, so tranquil he seemed, that

horse and rider might have been a single figure carved in granite and entitled, "The Spirit of the Plains."

"How tall he must be," she thought, "when he stands erect."

And a little wistfully she watched him, the one sail in all this prairie sea, move down the white road and beyond her vision. Then, in the motionless train, she lay down, her cheek pillowed on her muff, and fell asleep.

She was awakened by the sudden tumbling of her bags. The train had apparently started while she slept and stopped again. She sat up, chilled with the sudden opening of the door. A band of cowboys was entering the coach, their sombreros pulled low on their foreheads. She look at the watch on her wrist. It was three o'clock. Outside were the lights of a station. She rose hurriedly, putting on hat and fur, taking her bags.

And then she saw that the group of cowboys was gathered about the man with whom she had talked. They had obstructed him in the aisle, and two of them had covered him with revolvers. He was protesting, yet with a sort of fatality, mentioning Seattle. She waited as if hypnotized.

Was this, then, one of the holdups of which she had read? Or was he—could he be— She looked about for the two cowboys who had left Chilli-cothe with her and recognized them amid the new group. Could they then have been shadowing this man, and was he a fugitive from justice?

In any case the train might bear her past Pinkerton; so, reluctant to leave in such extremity one who had possessed her sympathies, she turned, carrying her bags and slipping out the rear door near her chair.

It was a small wooden station, its lamp-lit platform deserted except for one onlooker. This was a lean giant standing at one side, holding the rein of his horse. She could not fail to

recognize him. It was the rider she had seen in the white road. His yellow slicker was open, and on his breast she saw a silver star.

Tranquilly enough he watched the cowboys emerge from the train, bringing their quarry. The girl set down her bags and, moving close to him, spoke.

"Are you having him arrested?"

The tall rider looked at her, his hand moving to his hat.

"No'am." His voice, low and leisurely, reminded her of the voices back home. "I've got nothin' to do with it," he explained.

"Then what——"

"Why, they're havin' a persuadin', ma'am—that's all. I don't know what it's for, because I'm just in from Ipswich down the trail. But they need somethin'—maybe a school-teacher, maybe a mayor. Maybe he's a preacher and somebody wants to get baptized. They get notions like that, so when the Limited comes through they ride in and pick out the traveler that looks most suitable for the job."

"But that man has to get home," exclaimed the girl.

His droll dark eyes moved to hers.

"They all do," he answered. "That's where the sport comes in. He's alludin' to Seattle. I reckon he won't reach there any time soon."

She lifted her head, looking at the group.

"I reckon he will," she said.

And she sped forward, scarcely certain of what she meant to do.

"Wait!" she called, for the engine had whistled as she came.

The men turned. Most abruptly of all, the protesting stranger turned.

"What is it you people want?" she asked breathlessly.

One of the cowboys, apparently the leader, took off his big hat and bowed bewilderedly to this precipitate vision of strange loveliness.

"Why, lady," he answered, "it's an

emergency. 'Mumbly Jack's' brother's little boy has come to live out here. We got to have a celebration, 'cause he's used to 'em. We got to have it right—the real thing. And we don't know how."

"What kind of celebration?" asked the girl.

"Christmas," answered the man. "If we don't have it—and, have it like he's used to—he'll be disillusionized."

The last word descended into a fear-some bass. The stranger spoke again.

"Christmas," she submitted, "is two weeks off."

"Sure," acknowledged the leader, jerking a little at the handcuffs that linked him to the condemned. "And how do we know this Boaz County Limited is a-comin' through here again 'fore New Year?"

"But why," asked the girl, "didn't Mr. Mumbly's little nephew stay home for Christmas?"

"For one reason, ma'am, he ain't got no home. His paw's dead and his maw is——"

The whistle of the train shrilled sharp and sudden, followed instantly by the girl's voice, very low and soft.

"I'll do it," she said.

The leader looked embarrassed.

"We'd like to have you around," he said. "We sure would. But this is a man-size job."

"It's really a woman's job," she answered. "And I know all about Christmas—good old-fashioned Christmases."

The leader seemed impressed. All at once he turned, unlinking the handcuffs.

"Stranger," he remarked. "You can go."

He laid a hand in friendly fashion on the back of the reprieved. "Thank you jest the same," he added.

"Thank you," said the stranger, turning to the girl. He seized her hand, mounting the steps of the train. "If ever I can——"

The shrieking little engine drowned his words, stubbed its toe, and galloped away. The stranger waved.

"Where you bound for, lady?" asked the leader, turning to the girl.

"Why—the best hotel," she answered.

The men looked at one another and a second cowboy spoke.

"They ain't but two houses in town besides the depot here; one's Rankin's gener'l store and the tother's Monte Joe's."

A rich drawl came from behind her. "Take her to Monte's. There's a lady there."

She turned to find the tall rider with the star, her bags in his hands.

So toward Monte's they went, under stars beginning to pale with dawn, boarding presently the porch of a rambling wooden structure in whose lighted doorway a large man in shirt sleeves stood as if awaiting them. He drew hastily back as the girl appeared, allowing them to enter.

It was a broad hallway containing a redly burning stove set in a circle of rough chairs. Along the wall were the tawny skins of mountain lions, arranged at intervals, but precisely tacked in place. Above the door was a spreading pair of moose antlers, and, scattered on the floor were coyote and bear pelts.

"Monte," declaimed the leader, "this here lady sub'stuted for the gent we took. Make her comfortable."

Monte bowed, his equanimity not sufficiently restored to permit more, and taking her bags from the tall rider, started up the stair. Whereupon the band withdrew, bowing also as they went out, and the girl and the tall rider were left alone. He held out his hand.

"My name's 'Sudden Dave,'" he drawled. "I'm sheriff of Boaz County, and I'm travelin' from Ipswich to Bear's Tail."

And she, seeing that something was expected of her in this matter of introduction, answered:

"I'm Phoebe Kerr, and I'm traveling from Tennessee to California."

"Well," he said as they shook hands, "whatever your name is and wherever you hail from, you're a little sport."

Because of the swift sting in her eyes she looked away. Then she smiled bravely.

"I thought Pinkerton was bigger than this," she said.

"Well," he remarked, "it is. You lost consid'ble time at the tank, and this is not Pinkerton, you see. It's Angels' Rest."

Angels' Rest or Pinkerton, it could not matter now. Phoebe Kerr had given herself in ransom, and there was no turning back. Her trunks would change cars without her and wait in Los Angeles until such time after Christmas as the Limited came through again. Lucky she had her bags and had fortified them well for this overland journey.

In the clean, sparsely furnished room she slept till noon, the telephone having been muffled, lest it disturb her, and the breakfast bell, for the first time in its history, being left unring. At twelve o'clock—perhaps because she was heard moving about her room—Rosa, wife to Monte Joe, knocked at her door, advising her that a tiptoeing delegation had been waiting in the parlor since ten.

She dressed quickly, ate a breakfast of bacon and coffee, in the long, raftered dining room, declining its luncheon element of pie, and presently went into the parlor, a small square room just behind the stair.

The committee sat in a circle prescribed by the walls. It included all her acquaintances of the night before with the exception of Sudden Dave and the addition of a very small, very clean little boy. Indeed, they were all very clean, their hair very wet, their boots very shiny on the red and flowered car-

pet. Rosa's touch was manifest in the embroidered doilies, in the large lamp, and the lace curtains, the last so white and stiff as to betray evidence of having been bought and hung that morning.

Last night's leader drew forward the little boy.

"We want to present you to Dicky," he stated. "He's the one Santy Claus is a-comin' to see. We boys has worried along well enough without the old gent, but Dicky never has, and he knows well enough Santy don't fergit his friends jest because they move out West. Dicky, this here lady knows Santy pusionally."

Dicky lifed a round and awestruck face.

Phoebe, smiling down upon him, said softly:

"I'm glad I know Santy—and I'm glad I know you, Dicky."

Whereupon Dicky, surmising she was human, smiled, too.

A big English-looking chap rose from his corner and made strange motions to Dicky. Dicky looked wild, then,

"Howdy," he said.

The large gentleman sat down with obvious relief. Dicky was led out and the door closed.

The leader indicated the large gentleman.

"That's Mumbly Jack," he said, "Dick's uncle."

Phoebe and Mumbly bowed and the leader designated Phoebe's chair set a slight distance from the rest, so that when they all sat down it looked like a sewing circle or a Sunday-school class. Then Phoebe perceived that they had met to receive instructions regarding Christmas and its celebration. She introduced herself straightway and, looking around the circle, asked for all their names. Thereupon was presented to her "Elbow Ben," the leader, "Quirt Willis," "Hank," and "Ginger." She did not commit the impropriety of in-

quiring into patronymics, but descended straight upon the matter in hand.

Ten minutes later she had discovered that all toys and candies must be brought from Los Angeles and the tree and greeneries from far north woods. But her only difficulty lay in choosing between the volunteers.

"We ought to have a Yule log," she said at length, "but we haven't any fireplace. In parts of the South they have fireworks, too, at Christmas—sky rockets and Roman candles, the sort that shine up in the night sky like the Star of Bethlehem. And does anybody sing? We ought to have some carols."

There was a sudden shuffling of feet and the committee gazed on the red carpet. Whereupon she became aware that they all sang—melodiously.

"Then some one," she said, "whoever goes to Los Angeles, must get a book of carols. Does any one play—flute or violin?"

No, but it was learned that Ginger was a bear with the fiddle and that Hank could draw indescribable sounds from the "orrgin" in the corner. Then "Quirt" Willis rose to suggest that a few shots fired rapidly after each verse of the carol might be well, as sometimes putting more "pep" into a selection than an instrument might. Phoebe overruled this motion, explaining that pep would mar a carol, and they evinced a willingness to accept any theory of hers, however eccentric.

Sudden Dave did not appear. He was spending a few days at Angels' Rest, the boys explained, looking for Silky, who was said to be operating now between Ipswich and Bear's Tail. Silky, it happened, was the coyest and keenest little "hoss" thief that had ever worked that territory. He had been about for something like two months now, and none of the boys, including Sudden Dave, had ever clapped eyes on him. From those who had encountered Silky, however, and learned from sub-

sequent losses who he was, he was described as being a clean-shaven, youngish chap, dressed like a dandy.

"City manners," growled Quirt.

"Silk socks," sneered Ben.

That was why they called him Silky. "He always wore 'em. Oncet they was green."

Yes, Ben had to be away, but he left word that anything he could do to help along the celebration—

The meeting having been adjourned, Monte Joe explained the history of the lion pelts tacked so precisely along the lobby wall. They were souvenirs, treasured by the boys, the glorious insignia of their prowess with the rifle.

"This here was shot by Hank," said Monte proudly. "Nearly got him first. Quirt got this devil over in Black Cañon. Ginger took this'n with his little six-gun, didn't ye, Gin? Mumbly got this. Look at the shine on her—feel it."

Phoebe's white hand stroked the tawny trophies.

"If you miss them when I'm gone, well—" she said, and smiled.

The boys looked at one another, then away.

Elbow Ben wheeled abruptly.

"If we're goin' to have things ready by Christmas," he said, "we'd better get busy."

That night he rode out with Hank and Mumbly toward far north woods and Quirt and Ginger made ready for the trip to Los Angeles.

That night, too, hearing strange sounds in the hall below, Phoebe crept from her bed and stole to the stairrail to look over. Monte Joe was removing the lion pelts from the wall and giving them into the hands of Sudden Dave, who stood in the door. Now and then they both glanced up the stairway. Once they almost saw her. She stole back to bed, amused yet saddened, too.

The irony of their distrust of her who had not been afraid of them!

One day before Christmas Eve all was ready. Elbow Ben and his crew had come trailing in with a tree which, mounted on the newly erected platform, swept the rafters of the long dining room. Mumbly had hewn a Yule log of such proportions as to promise a three days' fire, for he figured it could burn in the open, while Hank had cut such mistletoe and holly that Monte's hall looked like the depths of Sherwood Forest when they all got through. Finally, Quirt and Ginger who had ridden out horseback, happened on their return from Los Angeles to find the Limited in a mood to leave Pinkerton, and rode back thereon, the baggage car so stuffed with their bundles and boxes that the burdened little engine didn't get a really good breath till it went limping out of Angels' Rest. These bundles and boxes were stored in the dining room, whose door was thereafter closed to Dicky, and everybody began to tiptoe and whisper as soon as they came into Monte's green and cedary smelling hall.

Then came that day before Christmas Eve all in a whirl of snow, with the wind chuckling in the flue of the big red stove and whistling around the corners to keep his courage up. And Phoebe, who kept the shades drawn always between herself and that blowing whiteness, came back to the dining room to add a few more baubles to the tree. The boys tiptoed in after her and presently Rosa came, too.

Phoebe let the boys festoon the garlands about the rafters and reach the highest places on the tree for her and light the lamps when the dusk came down; but after all there was very little left to do, and most of the while they were standing about watching her, avid of a smile or a command.

"Hope Silky don't come 'round t'-night and spile things," remarked Quirt, who had just brought the horses back from Pinkerton. "What 'ye

reckon? He stayed all night at a nester's house on Top-Knot and the baby got sick and he stole a hoss from the Yazoo Ranch, rid in fer the doctor and sent the Yazoo folks a letter next day tellin' 'em where the hoss was. Hit was there, too. The nester's wife had done noticed his socks, but what with the baby ailin' she never thunk much about 'em. Blue they was—sky-blue. An' he had a pulse biscuit."

"A pulse biscuit?" Phoebe looked around.

"One o' these here watches stropped to his wrist. He did, fer a fact."

"It's a goldarn shame," observed Hank, turning his head sidewise to contemplate the pink and silver angel he had just hung. "It's a cryin' shame we done quit hangin' hoss thieves 'round here. Shoot a man up, and it's life. Steal a hoss, and it's ten years. Barbarianism, I tell ye. We're driftin' back to barbarianism."

"Surely he won't come with the sheriff here," said Phoebe.

"Sure he won't," laughed Hank. "Not if he knows it. But Dave ain't a-advertizin' his whereabouts. He ain't a-blowin' a horn while he hunts that little fox."

"Let him come," said Monte easily. "Your horses is in the stable, there's a master lock on the door, and Dave's got the key."

And then they all looked around, for the sheriff stood in the door. His yellow slicker and high boots were covered with snow. He stood an instant in silence watching them, then he said:

"Boys, when you're through I'll see you in the parlor."

His tone brought them to his side at once, and the five of them followed him into the red-carpeted room behind the stair where the big lamp was burning. A broom leaned against the table.

"Boys," said Sudden Dave, when the door was closed, "you-all may not know it, but nobody but a blind deaf man

could miss seein' how things are around here. Now the lady can't take but one of you, and if she even does that it's got to be right away. She'll go as soon after the celebration as the Limited comes through, and that may be any hour. Rosa says she hasn't even unpacked her bags. Now my advice to you is to speak—and speak to-night."

He paused. The boys stared at each other, then at the red carpet. Dave took up the broom.

"I'll send Rosa out of that room," he offered, "and you can go in one at a time and try your luck. Elbow Ben here will choose some straws from this broom and you can proceed accordin' to the length of your straws—the shortest first."

There was a heavy silence, then Elbow Ben abruptly attacked the broom.

"Here's five straws," he said.

"Make it six," said Dave.

Ben made it six, and there followed presently the unsteady measuring of straws.

Sudden Dave himself had drawn the shortest.

He stood a moment looking down at his capture, then turning slowly he opened the door and went out.

Phoebe was still at the tree when he came into the dining room. Rosa, after a look at his face, rose softly and slipped out by the kitchen door. He did not move, but stood looking at Phoebe until, turning her head, she saw him.

"All right," she called. "Come hang this shiny star for me. I want it away high."

He went over, taking the bauble from her and, standing with it unmoving, meeting her eyes. Presently she turned from him and went over to the window.

"Come talk to me," she said from there. "I'm going to rest."

And she raised the shade, letting the lamplight glimmer on the falling snow. When he had come she spoke softly.

"I want to tell you why I—left home."

"Don't," he answered after a pause. "Nobody does—out here."

"But sometimes it—helps," she said. "I came away to—forget. I wanted to forget that it was—Christmas. I wanted to forget that men are faithless, and fickle, and not worth giving your all to. Christmas day, to-morrow, was to bring me—the greatest gift in the world. To-morrow I was to give—all that I had to give. I found that it was not to give me anything. And so I started to go where there wouldn't be—any Christmas, that is—anything that meant Christmas. But I found—I found that Christmas waited for me along the way, demanding a part of my gift just the same. And I found—I found that men, some men are faithful and fine and worth a woman's love. That's the Christmas gift you all have given me. I want to thank you for it. And I tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to stay an old maid so that I can go on loving you all. That's my Christmas gift to you. It's all I—have to give."

Dave stood very still.

"It's a—fine gift," he said earnestly. "I'll—tell the boys."

A wet shining came into Phoebe's eyes. She held out her hand, smiling up at him. He seemed not to see her hand at first, then suddenly he grasped it, held it an instant, and presently stalked softly out.

The boys were awaiting him in the hall.

"Gentlemen," he said, his hand on his holster, "the lady came out here to forget that men are ungrateful idjits. She's managed to do it. Anybody that goes buttin' in there remindin' her, gets his."

Nevertheless, in the afternoon of the next day the five called on Phoebe without Sudden Dave and presented a problem that had nothing to do with the lady's remaining in Angels' Rest.

Said Elbow Ben, rising to the red

carpet and betraying in his voice the general uneasiness.

"We done turned Monte's buggy into a sleight and we done fixed Quirt's antlers up to fasten on Dave's mule-streaked claybank's ears, so's he looks when decorated as much like a reindeer as a hoss, only some self-conscious and flighty—but who's a-goin' to wear that there Santy Claus costoom to-night we don't know."

"Doesn't it fit?" asked Phœbe.

"It fits anything, and it ain't onbecomin', so's to speak, to nobody. But we done each of us talked through a closed door to Dicky and he reco'nized ever' one of our voices. Now whoever wears that costoom takes the responsibility of disillusionizin' that child."

It then developed that the boys, felt the need of a persuadin' and wished Phœbe to speak to Sheriff Dave about the propriety of bringing the resting Limited up from Chillicothe. It would take influence of the first order, for Dave took no part in persuadin's, his office standing in the way. Phœbe, however, while beginning to comprehend the necessity for these functions, preferred to let things take their course, though she had set much store by that fur-trimmed costume and jingling sleigh.

The boys withdrew disconsolate, and that afternoon they remarked in the presence of the sheriff that a dudish-looking chap had been seen hanging about Chillicothe, hoping for the train to leave.

"City manners," growled Quirt.

"Silk socks," sneered Ben.

The sheriff cast his droll dark eye upon them.

"Why don't he steal a hoss and get out?" he inquired.

They didn't know, but speaking of gettin' out of Chillicothe—this was Hank and he had cast honor to the winds—the lady over there was hopin' for the Limited to come through as a

friend of hers from back East was waitin' there and might drop off. The sheriff cast his eye upon Phœbe, who was reading to Dicky over by the stove. She blushed, but did not lift her eyes. That afternoon he telephoned to certain august officials of the Boaz road, and the train was scheduled to pass through during the evening.

The boys were waiting for it, so was the sleigh. Dave's mule-streaked claybank, his harness bristling with holly, stood hitched to the transformed buggy. The antlers were waiting to be attached to his ears at such time as his flightiness might be worked off in a befitting gallop to Monte's. Dicky, hearing that the Limited was to pass through, had been kept peaceably at home only by being allowed to enter the dining room and look for the first time upon the tree. Very still he sat, gazing at that green and luminous miracle; Phœbe, all in white, hovering near him, promising to light all the candles as soon as the Limited arrived.

The snow had stopped falling, and all was still, with a big yellow moon climbing up the horizon and a few white stars. So clear a night it was that the smoke of the little engine could be seen miles away. Its panting could be distinctly heard.

"Dog-gone," said Quirt, "ef she ain't a-puffin', 'Merry Christmas!'"

"Dog-gone ef she ain't," said Mumby. And "Merry Christmas!" "Merry Christmas!" right past the tank came the little engine, whistling and ringing and stubbing its toe.

And all the boys sprang aboard.

Dave stood in the station door, long since aware of the real reason for the Limited's passing. He looked through the frosted windows of the coach and wondered what manner of assortment they had gleaned on this short notice.

It was larger than usual, but far from promising; three women and a baby, a colored deacon, the pelado who

sold tamales in Chillicothe, the Chinese cook from the Yazoo ranch, a little girl who lived in Pinkerton, and—yes—a prosperous-looking old gentleman who smiled at them pleasantly as they drew near.

"Just the guy," whispered Ben. "That white mustache—and that there twinkie."

But when they asked him to step outside he took a pad and pencil from his waistcoat pocket and touched his hand to his ear.

"He's a deaf-mutt," explained the engineer, who had followed them into the coach. "He rid down with me from Pinkerton last week. I think he's lookin' for somebody. The man in that seat—where'd he go? There he is on the hind platform. See how he'll do."

Ben looked at the stranger standing under the light at the rear, and decided from his back that he would do, assuming that he had his faculties. It was a good straight back, a well-tailored back. It looked even like a capable back, a back adapted to the successful bearing of any reasonable burden, however impromptu.

"Greetings of the season," declaimed Ben, and when the owner of the back turned about, the big revolver glittered beneath his nose. He lowered his cigar, looking from one to the other of them. His face was as agreeable as his back.

"Well," he said. "I've got my watch and some travelers' checks."

"Nothing doin'," said Ben. "We're after you."

A white shadow seemed to fall across the stranger's face. It was gone and he smiled, looking even younger than before.

"Show me your badge," he said.

"I'm showin' you my little gun," said Ben. "That'll have to do. That your bag on the seat in yonder? Get it, Hank. He may want the rest of us to carry him."

The stranger turned, dropped his

cigar over the railing, and descended the steps with the five. There he halted, his eye lighting on the crowd from the coach and on the tall man standing in the station door.

"What's the answer?" he asked.

And Elbow Ben told him to put his mind at rest.

The stranger whirled on him with suddenly knotted brows.

"A Santa Claus?"

And instantly he was on the step again. Instantly they grabbed him.

"Boys," he said, "I've got to go on—got to, do you understand? If you make me lose this train and be a Santa Claus or anything else, I'll murder your show. I'll be the meanest, touchiest, grouchiest crab of a saint you ever saw. The kids'll hate me. They'll be scared to death of me. I'll break the presents and get 'em mixed and swear before the ladies."

Elbow Ben began to look anxious, but Quirt said firmly:

"If you do we'll shoot you."

"All right. But you can't make a man jolly by holding a gun on him. And how would it look to the kids for you to shoot Santa Claus? Anyhow, I'll probably shoot first, for I'll be madder than you by a long sight."

The anxiety in Ben's face settled into reluctant conviction, a conviction shared presently by the others, including Quirt. Better no Santa Claus at all than one who would bring disgrace upon that ancient office and spoil their celebration. The stranger read their hesitation. He mounted the step again, lifting his hat with a smile.

"Good night," he said, "and a Merry Christmas."

Sudden Dave came slowly from the station door. He stood looking at the stranger and presently he took out his watch.

"Got the Chillicothe time?" he asked.

The stranger glanced at his wrist.

"One minute of eight," he said genially.

"I see."

Sudden Dave bent slowly above the step. For a second the light of his pocket flash shone about the stranger's feet. He raised himself, laid back the lapel of his coat, disclosing his star.

"Young man," he said, "you're under arrest."

"Arrest for what? So that I can be Santa Claus?"

"You'll be Santa Claus this evenin'—and a cheerful one. After that—we'll see."

He laid a hand lightly on the stranger's shoulder and the stranger, eying him a moment, stepped nonchalantly down. The boys looked at each other. So the yarn they had spun had proved to be all wool! Well, he was game—they'd hand him that. Was he game enough to be a good Santa?

"Like to go to the tree?" said the engineer to his crowd. The little girl from Pinkerton said she would.

"Come along, then. The train can wait till it's over, I reckon." And the engineer started off.

Nobody protested except the colored deacon, who withdrew his objection on overhearing Ben say that everybody must have a present from the tree. Nobody hung back except the deaf old gentleman. Somebody wrote the explanation of it all on his pad and the little girl from Pinkerton added a postscript explaining that she never saw a Christmas tree in all her life. So the deaf old gentleman trotted amiably with the crowd, all wrapped up in his fur-lined overcoat, holding the little girl's hand.

"Wisht now I'd thought about buyin' a ear trumpet," said Ginger. "I can locate somethin' for 'em all 'cept him."

Sudden Dave ushered the stranger into the station, where waited the Santa Claus regalia. Quirt and Ginger went to attach the antlers to the claybank and hold him until Santa Claus appeared.

It didn't take long, and he was the briskiest Santa you ever saw. His red boots gleamed in the moonlight and his white fur glistened. His cap was the jauntiest and his beard the jolliest of anything that had ever appeared in Angels' Rest. And he climbed into that sleight and took up the reins and away went the reindeer with the flags a-waving and the snow a-flying and the bells a-jingling. Oh, no, no! He had no idea of flying across the country and away with the start he had. Silky would never have done anything so crude as that.

With the sheriff in the lead and the guests from the Limited running behind, they all came to Monte's place, where the big Yule log was blazing outside and where Monte, who had stayed at home was letting off skyrockets, all gold and showery, around the moon. Phoebe, hearing them coming, ran back to call Dicky.

And in came Santa Claus, flanked by the cheering crowd.

Nobody suspected who he was, of course, except Dave and the boys. They had no notion, however, of leaving Monte out of the secret, so when they had all filed in at the door, except the deaf old gentleman, Ben hung back to mutter the news to Monte. The deaf old gentleman, seeing signs of astonishment on Monte's countenance, offered them his pad. Ben accepted it and, with a wink at Monte, wrote:

"I wouldn't tell no little feller who Santa Claus is."

Now it would have been just as well if he hadn't told Monte. Monte had been deputed to introduce Santa Claus from the platform, and it is a hampering thing to know overmuch about the celebrity we have been appointed to eulogize.

Monte, on the platform with his white and scarlet personage, got out his scrap of carefully inscribed paper and began hoarsely:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is the Old Nick."

An ominous shuffling of feet amid the audience caused him to bend a closer eye upon his manuscript.

"Old *Saint Nick*," he amended. But the blunder had left him weak, and he retired behind the tree, there to detach presents and hand them over to Santa Claus.

Sudden Dave sat in the front row amid the passengers from the Limited, who had been shown to these seats as honored guests. His demeanor was the most tranquil in the room, but he had his eye on Santa, ready for any move. And Silky would better be cheerful. He'd better.

Cheerful? Why that cheerfulness was without a flaw, except perhaps a little undertone of nervousness as if Santa were hurrying to get through. Monte's introduction had started a chuckle in his bright-red boots which, climbing upward by way of his pillowed front, trembled in his vast white beard and made him blink his eyes now and then when he came to read a name. Perhaps it was that chuckle that made his voice seem nervous, and not that he was hurrying at all.

To Dicky, crowded somewhat to the rear, Santa was looking exceedingly well. Dicky was accustomed to annual changes in Santa's physique and attributed them, without further thought about the matter, to the old gentleman's enviable gift of acquiring anything he pleased. Last year he had girth and a stammer. This year he had height and a chuckle. And never had he been so generous.

On Dicky's left sat Phoebe, her hand on his. On Dicky's right sat the little girl from Pinkerton, who had gravitated to that seat at sight of Dicky. And on the little girl's right, not far from the door, sat the deaf old gentleman.

The old gentleman had not looked at Phoebe, but from the minute the per-

formance had begun, Phoebe's hand, lying on Dicky's, had grown colder and colder. Almost every time Santa called a name she glanced at the old man. Or was she looking at the door, planning to slip out?

Anyhow, Dicky was summoned to the platform nine times, and presently the benches around him had to be moved to make room for his possessions. All the boys were remembered, and Rosa, and the guests from the Limited. The little girl from Pinkerton felt heft to a doll that Quirt had bought in a moment of mad surrender to blond pulchritude, and the deaf old gentleman received a mustache cup, donated from Rosa's parlor shelf. The little girl sighed rapturously and the old gentleman rose and bowed, twinkling all over.

And Phoebe—her name was called at last. Saint Nick took a card from the tree and carefully deciphered it.

"Miss Feeby Cur."

He pronounced it distinctly, and when nobody appeared in response, he looked at the card sideways and read the name again.

All the boys looked at Phoebe, and at last Dicky nudged her.

"He's a-callin' you," he said.

Presently Santa Claus came to the front of the platform and his eyes traveled over the crowd. He held in his hand a coat of tawny lion pelts with lining of pale-gold satin.

"Is Miss Feeby Cur in this room?" he said.

With the coming of Santa to the platform's edge Sudden Dave's hand moved slowly to his holster. Silky had started his trick, whatever it was. Perhaps Phoebe saw this move of Sudden Dave's. At any rate, she rose. She rose and came down the aisle and stood before Santa Claus.

And Santa Claus said, "Jeemunny Christmas!" and dropped the coat and jumped off the platform and grabbed her in his arms.

Now it was plain that, while Phoebe was not so astonished as the rest of them, she had not offered herself up to be grabbed. So the boys arose as one man, Hank's revolver going off spontaneously amid the rafters, and Sudden Dave's iron fingers separating the scarlet arms from their snow-white prey.

"It's all right," said Phoebe, a little uncertain smile playing about her mouth, her eyes shining.

She looked at Sudden Dave as if confident that he would understand.

"Do you mean to say," roared Elbow Ben, "that you know this sneakin', ornery, un-law-abidin' scoundrel?"

Whereupon the stranger turned upon him in so un-Santa Clausian a manner that Elbow Ben suddenly remembered the occasion and fell quiet.

"He's my friend," said Phoebe softly, her hand on the stranger's hand. "We were to be married—to-morrow—and there was—I mean I thought there was—some one else."

"That's better," said Santa Claus.

"So I came away to let him—to let her have the field."

"And I reckon she's got it," said Santa. "I came away, too."

"By the same trail," said Phoebe.

"By the same trail—when I could find it. By the same crooked, confounded little trail."

"That's no way to talk about the Limited," said Hank.

But Phoebe's face, all aglow, was suddenly lifted to the stranger's and the stranger's hand was tugging determinedly at his beard.

"Don't!" roared Ben to the stranger, seizing that tugging hand. Then in a whisper:

"You'll disillusionize Dicky."

The stranger continued to tug unmoved.

"Take Dicky out," he said.

So Dicky and the little girl from Pinkerton were taken out by the deaf

old gentleman, who offered himself for the post, and Santa Claus, unable to remove his beard quickly without tearing it, for Mumbly, his valet, had counted on no such emergency, stretched it to the length of its elastic strings and set it on top of his head, where it swept back from his cap like a great knightly plume. Then he bent over Phoebe's glowing face and kissed her before them all. I say "before them all." I mean, before Monte and Rosa and the guests from the Limited. All the others turned their heads away.

Then Phoebe put on the big tawny coat and thanked the boys all around for it, and said she knew which pelt was which, and never would forget. And Santa Claus started with her out the door and was held back by Ben until his waving plume should be reduced to a beard again. Then they all went out in the hall, where Dicky and the little girl from Pinkerton were jumping about and shouting:

"He can't ever go! Santy can't ever leave now!"

And Dicky was holding something behind his back which, still jumping up and down, he gave to Sheriff Dave. It was a note, a leaf from the deaf old gentleman's pad, and Sheriff Dave unfolded it and read:

Hate to do it, but I've missed my train out of Pinkerton and I've got to be in Bear's Tail for Christmas. I won't be there next day, but the claybank will, waiting for you in the Yazoo pasture—being's it's Christmas.

SILKY.

"He rode off on the reindeer," shouted Dicky.

"He put his mustache in his pocket," piped the little girl from Pinkerton. "So he didn't need the cup. He gave it to me!"

And she held it up in proof.

"Santy can't ever leave!" shouted Dicky again.

Then his face fell.

Santa was leaving that minute, strid-

ing away through the snow. Phoebe had already passed up the stair to put on her hat, and now Monte appeared with her bags. Presently a young civilian came up from the station and Phoebe put her hand in his arm. Then, Sheriff Dave in the lead, they all went to the station, the boys singing a carol as they went and winding up with another as the travelers boarded the train.

"There's a preacher in Pinkerton," said the engineer to the young civilian.

Then he climbed to his place and the

little engine, realizing the importance of the occasion, went bounding away without even stubbing its toe. And Phoebe and her stranger stood on the rear platform and waved and waved and waved. And the Limited dwindled to nothing between the moonlit tracks of snow.

Then Sheriff Dave walked to the lot at the rear of Monte's place and, unlocking the master lock on the stable door, borrowed a horse and resumed his journey from Ipswich to Bear's Tail.



NANCY

"Sugar and spice and all things nice."

YOU are a rose, but set with sharpest spine;
 You are a pretty bird which pecks at me;
 You are a little squirrel in a tree,
 Pelting me with the prickly fruit of the pine;
 You are a jewel, torn from crystal mine,
 Not like that milky treasure of the sea,
 A smooth, translucent globe, but skillfully
 Carven to cut and faceted to shine.

If you are flame, it dances and burns blue;
 If you are light, it pierces like a star,
 Intenser than a needle point of ice;
 The dexterous Hand which shaped the soul of you
 Blended, to mix and make you what you are,
 Magic between the sugar and the spice.

ELINOR WYLIE.

Ainslee's Books of the Month

NO DEFENSE, by Sir Gilbert Parker; J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, Pa.

THIS recent novel of Sir Gilbert Parker's is a tale of adventure staged in the latter part of the eighteenth century, with scenes laid in Ireland, England, the West Indies, and America. It concerns the trials and tribulations of Dyck Calhoun, a high-spirited, proud, young Irishman, and of Sheila Llyn, a beautiful Irish girl. These two meet and fall in love, but are immediately separated and are kept apart for seven long years by a series of events which carries them far from their native Ireland.

The story is swift-moving, one thrilling adventure following another from beginning to end, and the picture of Ireland and her struggle for freedom a hundred and fifty years ago is interesting, perhaps, in view of the Irish question to-day; but if the author is to treat of war and treason and mutiny, one cannot help feeling that in harking back to the eighteenth century, when our own age is so brimful of romance, his novel runs the danger of falling flat, of seeming a bit stereotyped. On the other hand, it may be argued that the reading public has had enough of stories which deal with our own immediate past and to them "No Defense" will come as a relief and a decided treat.

A WORLD TO MEND, by Margaret Sherwood; Little, Brown & Co., Boston, Mass.

THE author describes her book as "the journal of a workingman," and it is indeed an informal record of the contemplations of a cobbler, but of a somewhat unusual cobbler, a man of rare intellect and sensibility, who,

shaken by the war into a realization of the utter inadequacy of his previous interests, seeks a better understanding of democracy, seeks to be worthy of citizenship in the democracy. Setting aside his former aloof, critical, self-sufficient existence, he becomes a humble cobbler in a small coast town of Maine and strives, through contact with his neighbors, to see how the vision of the thinker in his study can be made to square with human life and human temperament as he finds them in the village of Mataquoit. Gradually he gains an insight into the daily lives of the villagers and becomes increasingly absorbed in their history and welfare.

The book awakens in one a warm feeling of hope. The problems which confront the cobbler are problems which confront us all in one form or another, puzzling us, distressing us, often leaving us blindly groping for a solution. Miss Sherwood has taken them up in a delightfully subtle manner, gently pointing out errors and quietly suggesting remedies, lest we allow the surging, noble emotion of our days of service to ebb back again. Out of the confusion into which we have fallen she draws a nobler conception of democracy than we, unaided, can discover for ourselves. A charming vein of humor runs through the book, lighting up the steady philosophy, and romance intrigues the reader to the very end. One feels refreshed upon finishing the book, so deftly has Miss Sherwood insisted that good shall come of evil, that the future holds for us unlimited scope for the development of a finer democracy than we have hitherto known.

L. F. W.



In Broadway Playhouses

By Dorothy Parker

Hang the Expense

MAYBE you like enormous productions. Maybe the blood rushes hotly through your veins when you reflect that the vast stage spectacle before you requires a company numbering four hundred, exclusive of camels and press agents. Maybe the thrills of ecstasy play gently along your spine as you compute the staggering cost of its costumes, scenery, salaries, fodder for the incidental animals, and pseudoleopard skins. Maybe you awake to spring as you review the long months which it must have taken to get the entertainment into running order. Maybe your heart leaps high as you confront a huge stage thronged with gorgeously costumed supernumeraries and deep-voiced principals baying long and abstruse speeches, with repeated references to Allah. Maybe that is the way you are constituted. Many people are like that.

If you are, the thing for you to do is to hurry up to the Century Theater, witness Morris Gest's production of "Mecca," and then dash off a nice, long, chatty, open letter to him. That is what everybody else does. It is doubtful, indeed, if Mr. Gest is receiving any sealed communications whatever these days. One cannot open the morning paper and turn to the theater advertisements to see what is still running with-

out crashing upon an open letter from some one who saw "Mecca" the night before and just can't keep from taking pen in hand to tell Mr. Gest all about what fun it was. The producer's correspondence includes autographed communications from such distinguished authors as David Belasco, his affectionate father-in-law, and as Mrs. Elinor Glyn, now visiting these United States; small wonder that he is eager to share his mail with the public.

The one from Mrs. Glyn, who saw the performance and immediately thereafter—at one a. m., to be exact—felt that urge to write which is experienced by so large a percentage of the "Mecca" audiences, is undoubtedly the gem of Mr. Gest's collection of bread-and-butter letters to date. What, after all, is there left to say? It is good to know that Mrs. Glyn's famous tiger-skin style marks her correspondence as it does her more pretentious literary works, but it leaves one virtually flat. What does there remain for any coarser pen to trace? That touch about "intangible subtlety," for example—where is there a happier phrase? And the bit about the "refined orgy"—is not that the perfect tribute? And the part where Mrs. Glyn speaks, with such telling casualness, of how she "stayed with the royal family in Petersburg in the old days!"

What has the present writer to offer in the face of that? Of what avail her laboriously worked-in references to the time when she used to live right around the corner from Evelyn Nesbit, or the good old days when she went to the school which was attended by the daughters of a distinguished brewer? These things sink to nothingness; the only refuge is an envious silence. Mrs. Glyn, once again, has said a mouthful.

Unfortunately, when she "hopes the American public really understand and appreciate," it is gravely to be feared that Mrs. Glyn will not get her wish, as regards this unit of the American public, at all events. Appreciation there was to an almost perceptible degree, but during the course of "Mecca" understanding was pathetically lacking. At no time during the evening could the present writer ascertain just what the entertainment was all about. Not once could her piteously straining mind grasp the relationship of the various characters, nor could it fathom the reasons for the impulsive knifings, poisonings, and abductions, which took place on the stage from time to time. Everything was rendered still more difficult by the fact that almost every actor in the company assumed a disguise of some sort at some time during the proceedings, while the sporadic bursts of songs which enlivened the production only added to her lamentable confusion.

But, any one with eyes must be awed by the gorgeousness of "Mecca," and staggered by its vastness. It is advertised as "The Largest Production Ever Known in the World's History," which is a conservative statement. It is comfortable to reflect that it gives congenial and remunerative employment to hundreds, including two exceedingly shabby camels, who, I am willing to wager, although my memory for faces is not infallible, made their debut in the world première of "Ben

Hur." The company is headed by Gladys Hanson and Lionel Braham, who have the requisite heroic physiques and resonant voices.

So great a production naturally required the combined services of a sizable crowd. Virtually every acknowledged specialist had a hand in it save "Babe" Ruth. Oscar Ashe wrote the book, Percy Fletcher did the mild and memorable music, E. Lyall Swete undertook the notable job of staging the piece, Percy Anderson and Leon Bakst designed the costumes, Carl Link did as much for the properties, Joseph and Philip Harker collaborated on the scenery, and so on, up to Professor George Bothner, who saw that the incidental wrestling match went off nicely.

The most important announcement is that Michel Fokine directed the dances, for they are startlingly beautiful. The famous ballet on the stairs is a marvelous picture, although many beholders may not be so struck by its refinement as was Mrs. Glyn. It is curious, indeed, that Mr. Gest has not received an open letter from Doctor John Roach Straton on this topic long ago.

But the ballet is not the thing about "Mecca" which lingers longest in the mind of the visitor. The most impressive feature of the extravaganza is its ever-present costliness. As well as being the world's largest entertainment, it must easily be the most expensive ever conceived by the mind of man. It is difficult, unfortunately, to refrain from thinking backward and being dazed, not by what the production must have cost, but by what the management might have saved by the simple means of not producing it at all.

To quiet down and give a thought to the less violently expensive dramas, there is the new Galsworthy play, "The Skin Game," being given at the Bijou. Many have been able to discern that

the play, which seems to be the story of the bitter feud between the families of an aristocrat and a newly rich manufacturer, is really far deeper than it would appear. They have it all figured out that "The Skin Game" is a symbolic war drama, with the aristocrat representing England and the manufacturer Germany, and the evicted tenants, over whom the fight begins and who are completely forgotten when the feud gets really under way, symbolizing Belgium. The idea works out with perfect smoothness, and symbolic meanings can be read into many of the lines, if one sets one's mind to it, and who, after all, are we to say that Galsworthy never thought of any such thing?

Yet it has always seemed to a perhaps prejudiced beholder that one can easily let oneself go when discovering supposed symbolic references; it gets into the discoverer's blood, and he finds all sorts of subtle touches into which he reads interpretations that would surprise no one more than the author. Why, indeed, should any keen symbol hound stop with the translation of "The Skin Game" into terms of war? Why not go right ahead and declare that "The Gold Diggers" really symbolizes the corruption of the White Sox, or that "The Bat" is, being interpreted, the future consequence of the adoption of Article X, as seen from a Republican viewpoint?

But perhaps it is best not to be too lofty about the symbolism of "The Skin Game," for Galsworthy might suddenly announce that it really is a war play, and then where would this department be? The thing to do is to play safe by saying that, all obscure meanings aside, "The Skin Game" has quite plot enough, taking it at its face value. There are times, frankly, when it grows long and irksome, but there are stirring moments of drama, and there is always the sense of witnessing a play surely written and firmly constructed. And

there is the fine performance of Josephine Victor, and those of Cynthia Brooke, Marsh Allen, and Herbert Lomas.

As for the new plays provided by our home talent, there is "The First Year," the delightful comedy of which the author, Frank Craven, is also the star. It is useless to attempt any synopsis of this surprisingly amusing play of the first year of married life, for, when you stop to think about it, there really isn't anything much to it. There are no situations to cite or lines to quote to prove its claim to be riotously entertaining. Its humor is the humor of Beatrice Herford's monologues, or of Clare Briggs' "Mr. and Mrs." drawings; everybody has people like that right in the family. For his careful and unexaggerated presentation of the events of home life, Mr. Craven can even be forgiven his interpolation of an instantaneous intoxication scene, or his introduction of the character of the cheery, old country doctor, or his usage of the line about the audible imbibing of soup. The piece receives the faultless acting it deserves from William Sampson, Roberta Arnold, and Mr. Craven himself.

Another native comedy is "The Meanest Man in the World," accredited to Augustin MacHugh, but showing the unmistakable traces—"the fine Italian hand," some critic with an original turn of mind said—of George M. Cohan. Mr. Cohan himself is appearing in the title rôle, but for only a limited time. And that's bad news, for the second and third acts are going to be pretty heavy going when Mr. Cohan is no longer there to help. The first act could never be anything except delightful, even if they got Robert Mantell to play the hero. That act has all the Cohan brightness, the Cohan unexpectedness, the Cohan snap and crackle of dialogue; the second act has them in a far less degree, although Mr.

Cohan's acting keeps your mind off that until after it is over; while the third act is just the sort of thing that would lend itself admirably to Mr. Cohan's burlesquing. It has speeches about "The way to keep happiness is to spread it all around," and—but why go on? You can see for yourself what it would be without George Cohan.

Then there is "Bab," the comedy which Edward Childs Carpenter made from Mary Roberts Rinehart's famous subdeb stories. The play starts out as if it were going to be about the most entertaining thing you ever saw, but there are four long acts of it, and it is really amazing how heartily sick you can become of subdeb characteristics in four acts. "Bab" stands between Booth Tarkington's brain children and F. Scott Fitzgerald's creations, in the gallery of adolescent portraits, but she is not a particularly happy medium; at least, you do not think she is after you have heard nothing but her enthusiasm for a four-act stretch. Helen Hayes, who has the arduous title rôle, plays it admirably for the most part, but there are times when in super-sweetness of mannerism and inflection she comes dangerously close to Ruth-Chattertonism.

As for musical comedies, there is "Tip Top," which has not only the ever-more-amazing Fred Stone, but the Duncan Sisters and the Six Brown Brothers. The only trouble lies in obtaining tickets for it; however, it will doubtless be at the Globe Theater from now on, so maybe your turn will come around. You may even make your fortune and be able to buy your tickets at an agency in a few years.

There is also this year's model "Hitchy-Koo," with Raymond Hitchcock, Julia Sanderson, and G. P. Huntly, and with music by Jerome

Kern. Too bad of them, isn't it, to get you all worked up with the announcements of the stars and the composer, and then to present to you such a uniquely dull entertainment? Even Mr. Hitchcock's celebrated ceremony of welcoming the audience loses its expected thrill; the laughter which greets it seems only accorded it for old times' sake. The songs could not be remembered by even Professor Roth, and the jokes are palsied with age.

And then there is "Mary," which has been running outside of New York for a year or so, and now comes to the Knickerbocker for an indefinite period. Again George Cohan has done it; he has presented the show so ably, made things go with such a rush, and engaged so tireless and good-humored an aggregation of dancers and comedians that the thing has gone over with a pronounced bang. He has had the help of Louis Hirsch's music, easily the most popular of the season, but it took Mr. Cohan to make the book and lyrics of Otto Harbach and Frank Mandel enduring. Perhaps it is just as well that, though everybody whistled "The Love Nest" all summer, little was known of its lyric until now; such things are better born when the weather is cooler. I haven't the heart to quote it in its entirety; I merely mention that its concluding lines run:

Better than a palace with a gilded dome
Is a love nest, that you can call home.

Thus ends the song, in a glorious burst of anticlimax. Since hearing the lyric, your correspondent has been striving ceaselessly, and ever without success, to think of anything which wouldn't be "better than a palace with a gilded dome." Is there no bright little girl or boy among our readers who can help out?

Robert Hichens' novelette, "THE FACADE," in the February AINSLEE'S.
A story you'll remember.

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

CHARLES LAMB once attended a dinner given in London to one of the surviving sons of Robert Burns on the occasion of his return from India. With more sincerity than tact, he said to the guest of honor, "My lad, I wish it were your father and not you that's here." Whereupon the matter-of-fact Scotchman replied, "But he cahn't be, you see, mon, for he's dead."

It's regrettable, of course, that the pleasant people of this world cannot stay on interminably, but there's comfort, after all—Shakespeare to the contrary notwithstanding—in the fact that the good works they have done live after them. And, happily, we can get from the contemplation of their handiwork ever-increasing pleasure. O. Henry is dead. And yet, while he lived and breathed, he was at no time more popular or more firmly entrenched in the hearts of the American people than he is to-day. And, because his early history is so inextricably bound up with the history and growth of AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE, we feel a peculiarly personal pride in the man and his achievement. And recently, as a result of the redoubled interest in O. Henry, we have been many times besought with such inquiries as: What was the first story of O. Henry's printed in AINSLEE'S? Just which were the O. Henry stories first published by AINSLEE'S? Is it true that the publishers of AINSLEE'S were responsible for bringing O. Henry to New York out of obscurity and launching him on a career which defies comparison in the history of American letters? Because it all makes a fascinating and colorful tale, we are contemplating early next year telling you something about O. Henry's connection with AINSLEE'S, as well as reprinting, from time to time, yarns of his which first saw the light of day through the medium of this magazine, and which now are hailed by the critics as masterpieces among short-story fiction.

AND now, while leaving you to the consideration of this more remote treat, let us tell you of some of the immediate pleasures being prepared for you. The February AINSLEE'S is a veritable constellation of today's brilliant magazine writers. See if you don't agree with us. A few years ago AINS-

SLEE'S created a pleasant stir in the literary world by presenting to its readers that intensely fine tale, "Barbary Sheep," by the well-known author of "The Garden of Allah." You remember it, so we need not dwell on it at length. Incidentally, it became one of the motion-picture sensations of the decade. We have for you now, and we'll give it to you in the February issue, Hichens' latest tale, "The Facade." It's a satirical story with a theatrical setting, and we are willing to hazard the guess that you will read from one word to the next with avidity, and that you'll chuckle contentedly for several hours after you have finished reading it.

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE'S "The Old Crowd" is such a human tale that you'll live right along with the characters. And it's one of those stories that has a "kick" in the end. What larger recommendation can we give it? In this number, too, one of AINSLEE'S favorites—now also a universal favorite—is back. Hugh MacNair Kahler's ripping story, "Counterfeit," in the February number, is one of the best and pleasantest arraignments of a prevalent middle-class society type, the *poseur*, that we have read in a long time. You know a girl just like the heroine of this story—her sisters are legion. Ferdinand Reyher, a young author who has a rare gift for story-telling, has an exceedingly unique and colorful tale in the February number, called "The Shadow on the Sea." The lady in it has several aliases and as many abiding places. And it takes subtle forces to chain her. It's a gripping yarn. If you want to keep your mind off everything else, we recommend this for an hour's indulgence.

But, after all, the greatest treat, because it will last the longest, is the beginning, in the next number of AINSLEE'S, of Berta Ruck's latest novel, "The Arrant Rover." It's such a good book that we hesitate to divulge any part of it and so mitigate the pleasure in store for you for the next few months. Archie Laverock, the hero, is one to thrill the heart of any girl. But he's more than a mere "tea idol." And the girls he gathers round him! Well, after all, Berta Ruck is a real artist when it comes to telling a story, so we'll let her tell it.

The advertisement features a large, stylized 'A to Z' graphic at the top. Below it, a central white oval contains the text 'Everything in Biscuit' and a paragraph describing the variety of products. Surrounding the oval are several boxes of biscuits, including Anola, Butter Thin Biscuit, Graham Crackers, Fig Newtons, Lorna Doone Shortbread, Nabisco, Uneeda Biscuit, Ramona, and Zu Zu Ginger Snaps. The background is a dark, textured surface.

A to Z

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NATIONAL BISCUIT COMPANY

ZU ZU
GINGER SNAPS

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Velvet Grip



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**Stops Hair Coming Out;
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A few cents buys "Danderine." After an application of "Danderine" you can not find a fallen hair or any dandruff, besides every hair shows new life, vigor, brightness, more color and thickness.

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

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USALYTE makes every gas-jot a furnace. It gives you heat where and when you want it. It uses no heat where you don't need it.

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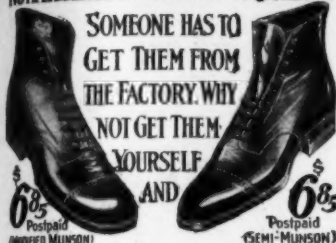
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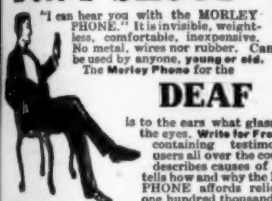
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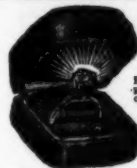
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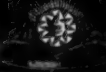
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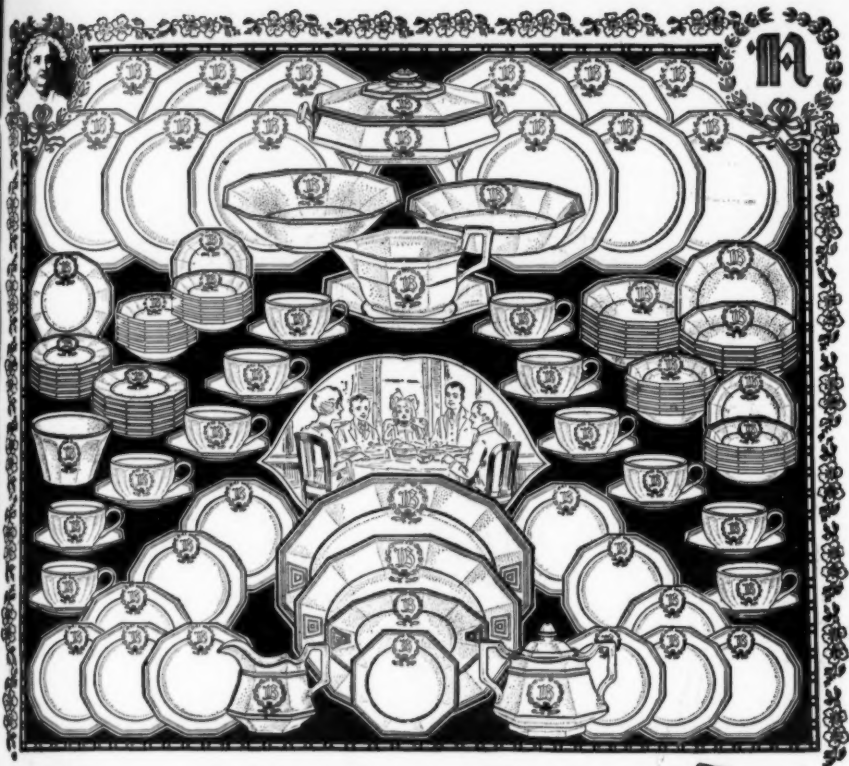
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Complete Set Consists of

12 dinner plates, 9 in.; 12 breakfast plates, 7 in.; 12 soup plates, 7 1/2 in.; 12 cups; 12 saucers; 12 cereal dishes, 5 in.; 12 individual bread and butter plates, 5 in.; 12 sauce dishes; 1 platter, 13 1/2 in.; 1 platter, 11 1/2 in.; 1 velvet dish, 8 1/2 in.; 1 sauce boat tray, 18 in.; 1 butter plate, 6 in.; 1 vegetable dish, 10 in., with lid (2 pieces); 1 deep bowl, 8 1/2 in.; 1 shallow bowl, 9 in.; 1 small deep bowl, 5 in.; 1 gravy boat, 7 1/2 in.; 1 creamer; 1 sugar bowl with cover (2 pieces). Shipped from Chicago warehouse. Shipping weight about 90 pounds.

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Enclose \$1.00. Send 110-piece Golden Martha Washington Dinner Set Number 327CMA19. I am to have 30 days' trial. If not satisfied will ship it back and you will refund my \$1.00 and pay transportation both ways. If I keep it I will pay \$3.00 per month until paid. Age, 36, is paid.

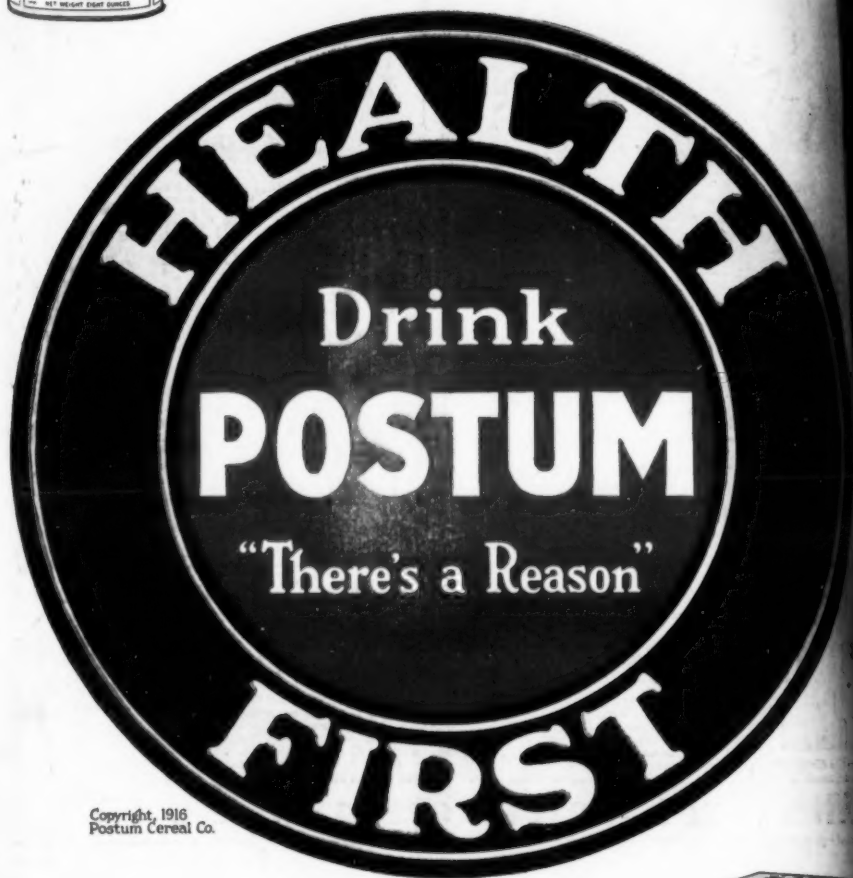
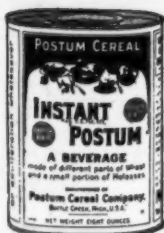
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